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WELCOME

EDITOR'S NOTE



Cara Rosner

Welcome to the winter issue of *Seasons of New Haven*®!

The year is drawing to a close, and what a year it has been. During these unprecedented times, when there is so much uncertainty and anxiety, I have greatly enjoyed working on this issue, which allows us to continue shining a spotlight on what is uplifting, innovative and positive in our community.

In this issue, we take you behind the scenes at WTNH News 8, where some of the station's most popular on-air personalities

share the journeys – both personal and professional – that led them to the station, and reflect on the rapidly changing news business.

We also talk with Dr. Keith Churchwell, who in October became the new president of Yale New Haven Hospital. Though his days are undoubtedly long as he leads one of Connecticut's largest hospitals in the midst of a pandemic, he still finds time to enjoy and appreciate his passions: good music, good food, and the inspiration he derives from hospital workers.

Also in this issue, we catch up with Jacob Padrón, the relatively new artistic director of New Haven's Long Wharf Theatre. Before COVID-19 hit, he was full of ideas to reinvigorate the long-standing theater along Long Island Sound, but – like so many of us – he's been forced to retool his plans in this historic era.

As always, I invite you to connect with us on Facebook and Twitter, and wish you and your family happy holidays and a health new year.

Happy reading,

Cara

Cara Rosner
Editor



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Cara Rosner

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Doreen Chudoba

Creative Director

Stacy Wright Murray

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For advertising information please
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WINTER 2020–2021

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Taking the Stage

Can Jacob Padrón save Long Wharf Theatre?

By FRANK RIZZO

Last year, Jacob G. Padrón was named the new artistic director at New Haven's Long Wharf Theatre, becoming the first Latinx artistic director to lead a major regional theater in the state.

Padrón soon began laying out a vision for the Tony Award-honored theater, centering on stronger bonds with the community – a commitment to inclusiveness and programming that reflected the diversity of the city.

But the theater was also facing the biggest crisis in its 56-year history: a decade-long string of deficits – some in the \$1 million range – as well as \$3 million in accumulated debt, a declining attendance and an endowment that was about half of what it was at its height.

“Basically, our survival is on the line,” Padrón said in early March. But a “Stabilization Initiative” was already in the works which would right the theater’s troubled finances over time. It was a \$5.5 million plan and the hopeful news was that theater supporters had already raised nearly half that amount.

At least that was the plan.

Then Covid-19 struck in the spring, forcing not only the last two plays of Long Wharf’s 2019-20 season to be cancelled but postponing the lineup of shows for 2020-21 as theaters across the country continued to deal with

restrictions on indoor gatherings and a greater unknown of what may be coming.

“The fundraising for the stabilization plan is not in the forefront now,” board chair Laura Pappano says. “What we’re doing is what many organizations across the country are doing, which is grappling with their immediate needs.”

On a sunny midsummer’s afternoon, Padrón stands outside Long Wharf Theatre, located in the middle of the New Haven Food Terminal on the outskirts of the city. The building is closed. A poster promotes a season that was cut short. Its outdoor parking lot is nearly vacant. It’s oddly quiet now, the silence broken only by the hum of the nearby highway and the occasional squawk of a seagull.

We are meeting to take some photographs and further our conversation about his career, his evolution as a gay man, and these unexpected times.

“There’s sadness about not being able to be in the space but I also look at the promise of what is to come, too,” says Padrón, a soft-spoken, measured man whose often-serious tone is balanced and brightened by a glistering smile.

“He’s not an ostentatious kind of guy,” says Stephanie Ybarra, a classmate of Padrón’s when both were students at the Yale School of Drama and who is now artistic director of Baltimore Center Stage. “Not in his

personal life and not in his artistry. He is thoughtful, reflective and deliberate in his leadership – and in his relationships.”

Like Ybarra, Padrón, is one of many people of color or women who are part of a new wave of leadership at nonprofit regional theaters across the country, one with a goal of systemic change towards equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Padrón, 40, is a third-generation Mexican-American, a social activist who came out in his mid-20s.

“Jacob’s journey is one of understanding and exploring how that part of his gay identity intersects with his Latinx identity, intersects with his Catholic upbringing, intersects with his artistry,” says Ybarra, one of the first people Padrón came out to about 15 years ago at Yale. “The fact that he is gay did not become the sole way he defined himself but rather contributed to this beautiful tapestry of identities that were already operating within Jacob.”

Padrón says each part of his identity has informed his values and often complement each other – but not always.

“I love the values the Catholic church has instilled in me but I also struggle with other parts of it,” he says. “The same thing with being gay. There are aspects of the gay community that I love and others I am challenged by – like the body shaming and the premium based on external



Jacob G. Padrón, shown here outside Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, never imagined he'd be guiding the organization through a pandemic when he became artistic director. Photo by **Frank Rizzo**.

factors. So with each of those pieces of my identity there is both the good and the bad.”

GROWING UP

The son of a business inspector for the state and a bookkeeper, Padrón grew up with in the conservative community of Gilroy, Calif., self-promoted as the “garlic capital of the world” and last year the site of a mass shooting at its annual festival.

When asked to describe himself as a youth, he says: “I think I was outgoing, but I struggled with social

pressures in terms of fitting in, finding my way. I definitely didn’t have a great high school experience the way in which high schoolers now are able to express themselves. There was a fair amount of teasing actually which was really difficult. At that age, I’m not sure I even had cognizance of being different. If I was attracted to other men, I wasn’t at all ready to acknowledge that.”

In his junior year of high school Padrón moved in with his grandparents who lived 25 miles away so he could go to another school

which his cousins attended, one that he felt was more friendly and safe.

His first experience in theater was when he was a boy at the Children’s Musical Theater of San Jose in “The Wiz” and “Peter Pan,” “but it wasn’t a particularly joyful experience because there weren’t a lot of people who looked like me. I remember the white kids being really dismissive and already, at that young age, I was feeling the dynamics of micro-aggressions.”

It wasn’t until he experienced a different type of theater – the civic-



Despite some challenges on the horizon, Padrón has a vision for Long Wharf Theatre. Photo by **Frank Rizzo**.

centric, Latinx-based El Teatro Campesino in nearby San Juan Bautista – during his teen years that he felt a special connection, one in which he not only felt refuge and comfort but a sense of community and purpose.

“That’s where I understood that theater could be a catalyst for social justice,” he says of the company in which he became a member.

Though he took some directing classes when he went to Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, his interest in college turned to social work. After he graduated in 2003, Padrón joined the Jesuit

Volunteer Corps and worked for a year in North Carolina, providing support for those living with AIDS/HIV.

Padrón considered returning to school to work for a master’s degree in social work but during an internship at Baltimore Center Stage, he felt the pull of the theater – and the power in its storytelling. He decided his passion for social justice and love of the theater could be compatible.

COMING OUT

In 2005, Padrón arrived at Yale School of Drama for its theater management program but still had not come out as a

gay man. Up until then, he says he was “still in the questioning, rather than accepting, stage. I was dating women and even in college I had a pretty serious girlfriend whom I thought I was going to marry. So it was a real pivot when I got to graduate school.”

In his second year at Yale, Padrón had an internship at Los Angeles’ Centre Theater Group. “During that time I met this gentleman and when people talk about falling in love and your heart really swelling, being really so happy to be in someone’s orbit – that for me was the moment where I thought, ‘Oh, this is what it means to

be in love.’ That was the moment that I knew I wanted to live freely and joyfully as a gay person and to really embrace my gay identity. It was also the time I told my family,” he says.

“My parents are very supportive. I come from a very religious family and, like so many Latinx families, very Catholic. But for my family, it’s about placing love and acceptance at the center.” He says he is now in a relationship.

MOVING ON

For the next 10 years, Padrón’s career touched on some of the leading institutions of American theater. While still at Yale, Padrón so impressed Bill Rauch, who was about to take over at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, that Rauch offered him a job as associate producer. “I felt like we were in deep synch about the importance of equity, diversity and inclusion,” says Rauch, who is now the inaugural artistic director of The Ronald O. Perelman Performing Arts Center in New York City. “I thought Jacob had so much positive energy and was so thoughtful about the kind of culture we wanted to create there – and for the American theater.”

But after four years in the rural setting of Ashland, Oregon, Padrón yearned for an urban, diverse environment and went to work at Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre. There he oversaw the artistic programming for the Garage, Steppenwolf’s second stage dedicated to new work, artists and audiences. It is a period that he remembers with mixed emotions.

“It was really a difficult time,” he says. “Martha [Lavey, the artistic director] was really tough on me. She was smart and passionate, but my experience with her was that if she didn’t believe you to be worthy of her intelligence, she didn’t engage with you. Steppenwolf is a predominantly white institution so navigating that

was really painful as a Latinx person – and as one of the few people of color there. Nonetheless, I’m grateful for my experience there because I learned a lot.”

Padrón says it was frustrating trying to change the institution solely from the inside. “I was trying to bring my value system and to shift the culture by advocating for artists of color, by asking critical questions but it was painful work. The OSF was probably where I felt the most empowered with Bill Rauch. I felt he really listened to me and was open to feedback and critique.”

Padrón left Steppenwolf in 2013 to work at New York’s The Public Theater as senior line producer.

“One of the things I love most about The Public was that you were never unclear about why you were there, that it was about [founder] Joe Papp’s mission of being in a theater company formed by the people and being deeply committed to social justice.”

During time there, the musical “Hamilton” was developed ahead of its 2015 premiere. “That was really exciting, and I got to go to those early workshops and be part of that experience as a member of the artistic staff.” Padrón also worked with his Yale classmate, playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney, for a new play at The Public called “Head of Passes,” which starred Phylicia Rashad.

“But it could also be very challenging there, too,” he says. “Even at The Public, we have to do a better job of amplifying the voices of Latinx stories. It’s just not happening. New York City is a city of Latinos, Dominicans and Puerto Ricans and their stories are nowhere to be found.”

It was at The Public in 2016 where Padrón had the idea for an initiative which would become The Sol Project, designed to amplify the voices of Latinx playwrights and build artistic homes for artists of



Pictured are scenes from last year’s Long Wharf Theatre production of “On the Grounds of Belonging” by Ricardo Pérez González, and directed by David Mendizába. Press photos by **T. Charles Erickson**



Photo by **T. Charles Erickson**

“... it really is going to be up to all of us working together, working in partnership, around this vision of what it means to be a theater company that is for the community.”

—Jacob Padrón



Press photos by **T. Charles Erickson**

color nationwide.

“Once it was launched and it started to take off, that’s when I decided to leave the Public and focus on The Sol Project full time.”

FINDING HOME

In early 2019, Long Wharf Theatre named Padrón its artistic director. Soon following him as part of the new leadership team were artistic producer Hope Chavez and managing director Kit Ingui. (Padrón also remains artistic director of The Sol Project and also teaches at the Yale School of Drama.)

Padrón arrived at a time when the theater was in a do-or-die situation.

“The board realized they could no longer do business as usual,” he says. “The organization was in crisis and

it continues to be so. I also walked into a culture that was unhealthy and unsafe. [Previous artistic director Gordon Edelstein was fired following allegations of sexual misconduct.] There was a lot that needed to happen,” he says.

“The city has always had activism as part of its DNA. I’m excited for Long Wharf to be part of the connective tissue that brings neighborhoods together, for Long Wharf to be held accountable to its community around the work of social justice and anti-racism, for the way in which we can all transform and grow together as a civic institution and as a civic community.”

Says Ybarra: “Jacob inherited quite a heavy lift but now he can do what he does best. Jacob sitting in

the artistic director’s seat carries with him, even among all of the scarcity, a spirit of abundance, joy and hope.”

Padrón announced the 2020–21 season – its 55th – just as the pandemic began in March. That season will now jump a year and begin in late 2021. But Padrón is planning activity before then, with the theater leaving its safe haven on the outskirts of the city to present some programming throughout New Haven.

“One city, but many stages,” says Padrón. “But it really is going to be up to all of us working together, working in partnership, around this vision of what it means to be a theater company that is for the community. Art has a bigger purpose to play, especially now.” 📺

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One Step Ahead

Chelsea Groton's Foresight Is Helping It Thrive

By JAMES BATTAGLIO

Call it a colossal coincidence, or even the ultimate irony, but Chelsea Groton Bank's decision to implement an emergency plan of sorts a few years ago is being called nothing short of "sheer luck" by the bank's leadership.

It began in a pre-pandemic moment when President and CEO Michael Rauh posed a "what if?" scenario, raising a hypothetical situation in which four or five key employees were unable to come to work for a few days. What would it take to guarantee that the bank could continue to operate at full capacity?

Neither Rauh nor members of his leadership team had an inkling that a worldwide pandemic was looming and would subsequently far exceed "a few days," or even a few absent employees. When COVID-19 hit, the majority of the Bank's back-office team would not be returning to the workplace for months. While branch drive ups remained open, and lobbies open by appointment, staffing was also limited in branches.

"Honestly, we never envisioned the degree of disruption the pandemic would create," says Rauh. "We simply thought it would be a good idea to prepare for a few days of disruption."

Rauh and his team hunkered down and formulated a plan whereby Chelsea Groton

could continue to operate at full capacity, as it has for 166 years.

Months of prepping - and the massive revamping of technology designed to address the "what if?" question - enabled the bank and its customers to never miss a minute of service between spring and autumn this year.

"We started a process that would allow ourselves to operate from remote locations," says Rauh. "Certainly, we didn't know there was a pandemic coming."

The just-in-case plan entailed far more than an overnight transition for the bank. It required months of strategy and equipment upgrades outside the confines of the bank's interior.

"When the pandemic hit, we literally

had people working 24/7 while we were scattered to the winds," says Rauh, "so we were very fortunate to have invested in technology before we actually needed it. The upgrade made us look smart because now other organizations are scrambling to do the same thing we did."

During the pandemic, all departments have remained operational, thanks to employees being supplied at-home computers, printers and cameras that enable Zoom conference meetings. They handled low interest mortgage rate transactions and four years' worth of Payroll Protection Program (PPP) loans in eight weeks, processing "an incredible volume of work," says Rauh.

"We had our highest year ever in terms



Alex Masse



Carolyn Welch



Michael Rauh

of home lending transactions. And the team processed \$74 million in PPP loans, working 24/7," he says.

"Processing loans over two months wasn't just the lending or commercial departments. It was the coming together of the entire Chelsea Groton team," says Carolyn Welch, senior vice president and commercial lending manager. "We positively impacted 5,000 jobs among 567 businesses. That's absolutely huge!"

An integral part of the bank's upgrade involved replacing traditional ATM machines with interactive teller machines (ITMs). Early on, Chelsea Groton installed five ITMs, with plans to eventually replace each of its remaining ATMs. "That, too, was a project the bank had the foresight to implement before the pandemic struck," Rauh says.

"These highly functional ATMs with video screens enable customers to confer with a live teller based in our local call center. The machines have the capability of doing almost everything you could do in a branch. You can cash a check to the penny, transfer funds, make cash and check deposits and more - all from a video screen," he says.

Rauh believes Chelsea Groton is the only local business that has "robustly invested in this technology," adding, "we've had a great deal of inquiry from other banks about our virtual desktop." He recognizes that "it's not been easy... although people are understandably tired, I'm very proud of the entire team."

The innovations that Chelsea Groton has installed are not over. Soon comes the second phase of upgrade: a secure app to have video calls with a banker, similar to FaceTime. "Customers will be able to have secure video calls so they can talk face-to-face with their banker, share documents and more, all at the time that is most convenient for the customer," Rauh says.

According to Alex Masse, senior vice president and director of operations and business intelligence, the video banking app is "scheduled for implementation later in the year."

Not all of the bank's COVID-related activities involve technology. Special lending and forgiveness programs through the bank, and acts of charity by the bank

Not all of the bank's COVID-related activities involve technology. Special lending and forgiveness programs through the bank, and acts of charity by the bank and Chelsea Groton Foundation during the pandemic have played a major role as well.

and Chelsea Groton Foundation during the pandemic have played a major role as well.

"We looked at this situation as an opportunity for an organization whose roots are in the community to gear up and do what we do best...help people," Rauh says. "We were determined to carry out our original mission of helping [our] customers and the local community with their financial needs."

Recognizing that a large number of furloughed citizens would be struggling to make loan payments, the team approved temporary deferments on existing loans, waiving fees and helping to secure low-cost, forgivable, Small Business Administration loans for local businesses and nonprofits.

Also, the Chelsea Groton Foundation, which has donated \$4 million since its founding in 1998, plans to double its average annual giving this year.

"Normally we donate nearly \$500,000 to the community through grant cycles in the spring and fall," says Rauh. "This year, we agreed there would be a lot more need among individuals and various organizations. Many of the region's nonprofits have been unable to raise money through functions and events. In many cases, their income has gone to zero."

By September, the Chelsea Groton Foundation had already awarded a full year's worth of grants and committed to double that by the end of the year.

What about bank customers? Are

they satisfied with Chelsea Groton's commitment to them and to the community?

Masse said feedback thus far has been positive, with customers exclaiming that PPP loans allowed them to "get through the toughest times."

"It's exciting to know we helped businesses this way. I'm proud to say we were able to accomplish that," he says.

Despite all the positive news coming out of Chelsea Groton Bank, Rauh says "there is a down side to this...the absence of human interaction, and the camaraderie."

"Zoom-like technology replaces some of that, but not necessarily all of it," he says. "I believe most of us will be working remotely for some part of the week in the future, but at some point — when it's safe to come out — we are going to want to gather 10-15 people in a room to have face-to-face conversations, and even have two or three people meeting at the coffee machine. Personally, I miss that interaction. A big part of our culture is knowing each other and what's going on in each other's lives. Those kinds of relationships are hard to develop from a 1-by-2-inch [Zoom] picture on a screen."

Finally, Rauh expresses pride in what he calls the CAT (Chelsea Activities Team) which, despite employee isolation, puts on a huge number of events aimed at boosting morale.

CAT has virtualized itself during the pandemic, creating the equivalent of an internal Facebook page on which employees have posted photos of themselves working from home, which includes their "co-workers...kids sitting on their lap while they're trying to work, or pets in the picture."

"We've even done virtual water cooler chats, and held entertaining things such as trivia contests, or even a virtual walk during which everyone gets on their cell phones and talks while taking a walk. These things help us maintain social interaction through technology," he says. ■


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Making Connections

WTNH personalities value their relationships with viewers, communities, and each other

By **JOEL SAMBERG** / Photographed by **ANTHONY QUINN/WTNH**

Not everyone grows up knowing for sure they want to work in television news. But almost everyone who does ends up wanting to stay in it for as long as they can.

Between the significant value of what they do for the public and the pleasant camaraderie that develops among colleagues, this is one profession that can slip into a newscaster's skin as seamlessly as a newscaster can slip into the living room of anyone with a television set. Or a computer. Or a Facebook account. Or a smartphone.

Indeed, social media and digital communication have altered the on-air news game from the way it was years ago. But one important thing remains exactly the same: it's all about sharing stories, which is what most TV news people value as much as any other part of the job.

"The basics of telling a good story have not changed," says Darren Kramer, late afternoon and evening anchor at News 8 WTNH. Kramer is one of those who had a notion of his profession long before he ever needed a job. "For some reason," he says, "television news was the only thing I ever wanted to do. My parents were avid news viewers when I was growing up in northern Wisconsin, and it had a significant impact on me. I just had to figure out how to get there."

He got there by obtaining a communications degree from the University of Wisconsin and then landing jobs in television news in Wausau, Wisconsin; Springfield, Massachusetts; Spokane, Washington; St. Louis, Missouri; and Chicago, before finding a long-time television home in Connecticut.

Co-anchor Ann Nyberg, who often shares his on-air schedule, has a similar how-I-got-here story.

"I was a storyteller from the time I was little," she

recalls of her childhood in South Bend, Indiana. (She was born in west Texas.) "It started with a diary my mother gave me when I was eight. I kept track of everything. My love of storytelling led me to major in journalism at Purdue University. I guess you can say that I can't wait to find things out and then tell everyone about it."

Kramer and Nyberg recognize that social media has refashioned the vocation from the way it was when both began.

"Years ago, it was a one-way conversation," Kramer notes. "People watched the news on TV, and if they had something to say, they'd either write a letter or call the station. Today, the feedback is instant."

That, he says, is the good news about online networking; the bad news is that it is easier than ever for anyone with a digital device to spread "news" that may not even be factual. That makes it imperative for viewers to choose their news sources carefully – and for news organizations like WTNH to earn viewer trust through diligence and professionalism.

"There are very few exclusive stories these days, since everyone has a phone and can take photos and write about what they see," says Nyberg. That can be a challenge for news organizations. But Nyberg and her colleagues meet that challenge daily, a fact clearly demonstrated by how long many of them have been in the business and at that station, the enduring closeness of the team, and consistently good ratings.

According to "Good Morning Connecticut" co-anchor and consumer investigator Laura Hutchinson, one interesting aspect of being an on-air television news personality is that some of the greatest joys occur behind the scenes.

"When you choose this as your profession, you often think the most exciting thing will be the television part," she says. "But in reality, it's what happens off the air that

“

**For some reason,
television news
was the only thing
I ever wanted
to do.”**

—Darren Kramer



“

**I was a storyteller
from the time I
was little.”**

—Ann Nyberg

I like the best, such as school visits, community activities, collaborating with coworkers on big projects – even just writing and planning.”

Hutchinson is another TV pro who decided as a youngster that television news was what she wanted to pursue. “I always watched News 8 with my parents when I was growing up in Hamden and once got to meet some of the anchors when they visited my school.” That seemed to clinch it for her.

Today, despite all the microphones and lights, the adrenalin-pumping deadlines, and the immediate social media feedback, what she likes best is the thrill she gets when she visits students in a classroom and sees the same

kind of captivated expressions on young faces that she once had on her own. “For me, the best part of the job goes well beyond what you actually see on TV.”

Hutchinson studied political science, broadcast journalism, and broadcast production at Temple University in Philadelphia. Even though she entered the business just a dozen years ago, she acknowledges that social media in her earliest days on the job was nothing like it is today, which makes her realize how much TV news has changed in a relatively short period of time.

“With digital communications we reach more people than ever before, but the competition with all other sources for getting and sharing the news is huge,” she says. On the

other hand, she and her colleagues have decisive technological and transportation advantages over social media users, particularly for breaking news.

Being on air – whether in a studio or out in the field – means being in the public eye. That, in turn, requires TV news personnel to be constantly mindful of what they’re wearing, their overall mood and comportment, whether or not they have a solid handle on the facts of the stories they are covering, and if the names they intend to mention will be properly pronounced. There is no denying that YouTube is loaded with hundreds of videos of on-air gaffes, including

wardrobe malfunctions, unexpected interruptions, and inadvertent references to topics that would normally be off-limits. What’s more, the news itself can be relentless, adding to the stress.

“Yes, it’s all bit more unscripted than I had anticipated,” admits noon anchor and medical reporter Lisa Carberg. She cites the time period between August 2011 and December 2012, during which Connecticut experienced the devastation caused by Hurricane Irene, the Sandy Hook school massacre, and Superstorm Sandy. It was, in essence, one long, uninterrupted news cycle that shook even the toughest

“

**For me, the best
part of the job
goes well beyond
what you actually
see on TV.”**

—Laura Hutchinson





With social media, we can be so much more connected with people.”

—Joe Furey



reporters. “And now, guiding people through the pandemic is another challenge, made all the more demanding by the need to stay safe myself for high-risk family members,” Carberg says.

Her road to news broadcasting started with her love of writing, and the skill to back it up. “I thought I’d end up working for a newspaper or a magazine. But I interned at a television station during college and saw how impactful it was to tell stories with video and sound. I never looked back.”

An Old Saybrook native, Carberg studied communications and journalism at Florida State University and Suffolk University in Boston. She began her broadcast career as a reporter and photographer in Wilmington, North Carolina, then anchored in Savannah, Georgia, followed by a stint with Fox News, and finally a return to Connecticut.

“Being the noon anchor and a medical reporter feels like home to me,” she says. “It’s a nice fit.”

As imperative as it is for Carberg and her coworkers to accurately report what’s happening in the world, some know it’s just as imperative to accurately report what’s happening in the sky. That’s where WTNH’s Joe Furey comes in. After all, weather is news.

Furey, co-chief meteorologist, did not intend to go into television news. “It was never on my radar,” he confesses.

Instead, he wanted to run a weather service and be on the radio. After receiving degrees in meteorology and business from Pennsylvania’s Villanova University, Furey worked at Western Connecticut State University. There, he conducted meteorology research as assistant director of the school’s Weather Center, which was founded by the late Dr. Mel Goldstein, who eventually became a legendary weathercaster at WTNH.

“Dr. Mel had extremely high expectations and demands,” Furey recalls. “One was that you were at work at 4 a.m. and didn’t end your day until after 6 p.m. So I was trained to work long and work hard right from the start.”

He says that in the past, his phone would ring constantly at the station’s weather office, with people asking whether or not to postpone their outdoor plans. “But now everyone essentially has radar in their own hands with their phones and weather apps.” That’s one difference from the old days. “But also with social media,” Furey adds, “we can be so much more connected with people. And now viewers know much more about our personal lives, too.”

WTNH first went on the air in 1948 as WNHC-TV, founded by the Elm City Broadcasting Corp. as an affiliate of the old DuMont Television Network. It is Connecticut’s oldest television outlet and the second oldest in New England. Back then, with no studio facility of its own, the

station simply sent out the signal of DuMont's New York City flagship station. The WTNH of today resulted from dozens of changes in television broadcasting rules and regulations and many corporate mergers and sales. In addition to its main studios in New Haven, the station operates bureaus in New London and Hartford.

One of the earliest slogans used by the station, from the early 1970s, was "Let's Get Together on Channel 8." That went through many changes over the years, including "Let Us Be the One," "We're With You," and "If It's Connecticut, It Must Be Channel 8." Now it's "Who's Got Your Back?" which reflects how the station's on-air personalities try so hard to have the backs of their viewers,

the backs of their coworkers and, in some significant ways, their very own backs. In other words, they want to enjoy what they do for a living – and even in these days of 24-hour news cycles and social media influence, they make sure they do.

"One way to measure success is by your ability to have a darn good time getting the story behind the story," emphasizes Nyberg.

"For me, success is measured through happiness," says Hutchinson. "I tell my son how important it is to apply yourself so that you can end up doing what you love to do. Because when you're happy at work, it just makes it a little easier to enjoy all the happiness at home." 📺



“

Being the noon anchor and a medical reporter feels like home to me.”

—Lisa Carberg

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 A portrait of Dr. Keith Churchwell, a Black man with a receding hairline, smiling at the camera. He is wearing a dark pinstripe suit jacket over a white shirt and a light-colored patterned tie. A blue and white patterned pocket square is visible in his jacket. The background is a blurred medical setting with large white and blue equipment.

A Man With A Mission

Dr. Keith Churchwell guides Yale New Haven Hospital through an unprecedented time

By CARA ROSNER / Photography courtesy of Yale New Haven Hospital.

Dr. Keith Churchwell knew early on that he wanted to be a cardiologist but didn't set out to become a hospital administrator. He knew he wanted to have an impact on patients' lives, on a daily basis, and for a while the best way for him to do that was by being a practicing physician.

But as his career evolved through some twists and turns, he developed a love for bringing people together, solving problems, and working toward common goals. That path led him to pursue a career in hospital administration - and these days his decisions impact thousands of patients, as he became president of Yale New Haven Hospital in October.

Churchwell, who lives in Guilford, arrived at the hospital from Vanderbilt University Medical Center, where he was executive director and chief medical officer of the Vanderbilt Heart and Vascular Institute. At Yale New Haven Hospital, prior to becoming president, he was chief operating officer and executive vice president, having

previously been a senior vice president.

In addition to his work at the hospital, he is on the national board of directors of the American Heart Association and is president of the New Haven Symphony Orchestra.

Q: What led you to pursue a career in medicine and, ultimately, in hospital administration?

A: It was not exactly a straightforward path. In the ninth grade, I was asked in an economics class to write an essay on what career I'd want to pursue. I thought about a career that would mix an interest in science, my interest in helping people, and something that I thought would actually be a life career - one with the appropriate twists and turns to stay interesting.

I made up my mind I was going to be a physician, but I didn't know what type. I decided to become a cardiologist. It held my interest, and I knew I would make an impact on a daily basis, from a patient perspective. I found out that I really love talking to patients. I really love taking care

of patients; I love trying to solve their [cardiovascular] riddles.

Then the twisting and turning started. My brother [also a doctor] called and said his group was looking for a cardiologist to help them with a new practice that they were starting to build [in Tennessee]. So I ended up back in Nashville, which is where I grew up, and which I thought I would never go back to. But I stayed for 20 years. I took on more and more responsibility in the development of that program. I love bringing people together around a common goal and thinking through problems.

Q: What is a typical day on the job like for you these days?

A: Because of the pandemic and because of social distancing, you're on Zoom all day. I can easily start the day at 7:30 a.m. and I'm in meetings until 6 p.m. You're in that all day. Prior to COVID, I was meeting with people, in the hallways, and also traveling.

It's a heavy day, dealing with the clinical opportunities and the problems around COVID, and the financial issues that we've got because of COVID; thinking through new opportunities we're trying to develop; and thinking through how we continue to mentor people. It's a busy day; it's a busy week.

Q: Although we are in a pandemic, are there any things you see within the hospital that bring you optimism?

A: There are a ton of bright spots every single day. In the midst of all this, which is incredibly complex and life-altering and life-threatening ... the work ethic [among hospital staff] is just amazing. The sacrifices that people continue to make eight months into this pandemic to ensure that we are delivering the best, the most optimal care for everyone who walks through the door, is inspiring every day.

And their attitudes, which are cheerful and uplifting. And I know they are just working at the limits of their endurance. It keeps me up at night a bit [worrying about the toll COVID is taking on first responders] but there's a bit of a charge every single day, seeing this happen.

Q: What's the best and hardest part of your job?

A: I'm not sure there's a toughest part. I actually enjoy all of it. I'm always asked if I miss seeing patients. In

this position, I don't just have one patient; I'm kind of responsible for every patient, everyone who walks through the door. That keeps me pretty charged during the day, and thinking about what we can do better and what we do best.

Q: What inspired you to take on a leadership role at the New Haven Symphony Orchestra?

A: Music has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. I played [trumpet] in high school, played in jazz band in college. I developed an interest in all kinds



of music. My wife and I, we love the experience of the symphony. We love studying the music. It's calming, it's an enjoyable experience. It's something that's a true hobby, something that you can share with your family.

I was on the Nashville [Symphony] board when I was there. Then I was asked to join the New Haven Symphony Orchestra board, and I've been president for the past two years.

Q: When you're not working, what is your favorite way to spend a day in or around New Haven?

A: The last great day before my daughter left [to study abroad], we went to the Mystic Seaport Museum. That was fantastic. For us, being this close to New York City has been wonderful. Prior to COVID, we would be spending time on Broadway, and at the Met, and shopping.

Closer to home, I just texted my wife to pick up Bar Bouchée for dinner. I would say that's our favorite eatery. The food is very, very good. We would probably be described as regulars. 🍴



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PEARLY WHITES: Chairalis delights in her new, beautiful smile ... a wish come true.

Making Dreams Come True



By **JOEL SAMBERG** / *Photography courtesy of Make-A-Wish Connecticut*

Make-A-Wish Connecticut is facing a fight to grant the wishes of the state's most critically ill children. Perhaps without even realizing it, a teenage girl from New Haven asked Make-A-Wish Connecticut for a gift that essentially describes what drives, defines, and motivates the organization in the first place: a smile.

The 17-year-old girl has a genetic disorder; the treatment she receives impairs the enamel of her teeth, making her exceedingly self-conscious about her appearance.

"The thing is, she loves to take selfies, but she never smiles when she takes them because of her insecurity," explains Pam Keough, president and CEO of Make-A-Wish Foundation's Connecticut chapter in Trumbull. "Her wish was to have a beautiful smile. That's the kind of wish that speaks directly to our mission to deliver hope and joy to as many children with critical illnesses as we can. Basically," Keough adds, "this girl's wish is our mission."

In 2019, the Make-A-Wish Foundation, nationally, granted more than 15,600 wishes to children who had been

diagnosed with critical and, in many cases, life-threatening illnesses. As its website states: "For children diagnosed with critical illnesses, a wish come true can be a crucial turning point in their lives. A wish can be the spark that helps these children believe that anything is possible and gives them the strength to fight harder against their illnesses. This impact is why we are driven to make every one of these wishes come true."

Since its inception in 1980, Make-A-Wish has given hope to and lifted the spirits of more than a quarter of a million youngsters. For more than 35 years, the organization has been the largest of its kind in the world.

The Connecticut chapter, one of 60 coast to coast, was established in 1986.

"Connecticut really isn't that big a state, and in a way that's what is really special and unique about our chapter. Our relatively smaller size makes it easier to work closely with individual and corporate donors from one end of the state to the other," Keough notes. "What's more, if we want to physically go see the family of a child whose wish we are working on, we never have to hop on a plane to do it." Often, that's a quicker and ultimately safer option than what



HOLIDAY JOY: One child's wish to go to Australia was revealed last holiday season at Macy's at the Danbury Fair Mall, as part of the Macy's "Believe" campaign.

other state chapters have available to them.

While that kind of logistical and operational benefit has always been of importance, it has taken on even more consequence during the coronavirus pandemic. And while a small state does allow some opportunities that larger regions may not enjoy, social distancing and economic strife nevertheless bring along with them other challenges. Most significant among those challenges is being able to raise the funds necessary to continue to grant the wishes and run the chapter in the ways Make-A-Wish Connecticut has come to depend upon.

"We've been working for almost a year now to diversify our fundraising efforts in such a way as to fully counteract the downturn in financial support – a downturn directly related to COVID-19," says Tara Navara, chief development officer. Navara acknowledges that in 2020, Make-A-Wish Connecticut

has been at 50 percent of its average fiscal goal for the year.

"The flip side," she adds, "is that we are still able to count on support from corporations, from grants, and even from individuals, some of whom end up giving just a dollar – which is obviously a donation straight from the heart, because they are thinking about their own loved ones. These individual supporters are wonderful," Navara says.

"Our corporate relationships have also been so strong over the years, so much so that once these companies are able to rebound, we just know we'll be able to count on them to the extent we did before," Navara continues. "We'll get through the pandemic together, and we'll bounce back together."

Connecticut parents, grandparents, and children have a unique opportunity again this year to make a difference. Through the Macy's "Believe" campaign, folks can write letters to Santa and drop them in a big red letterbox in a Macy's store or send them online. Macy's will donate \$1 for every letter written, up to \$1 million, to Make-A-Wish, to create life-changing wishes for children all across the country. To send a letter online or to donate directly to Make-A-Wish, visit macys.com and click on the maroon "Believe" banner. Macy's has partnered with Make-A-Wish to raise funds for wish-granting since 2008.

Make-A-Wish is a nonprofit corporation, nationally headquartered in Arizona, that spends every non-operational dollar on the specific granting of wishes, accounting for nearly 80 percent of its revenue. The wishes these children have stretch from superhero visits and backyard treehouses to scuba-diving lessons and horse riding. It is conventional lore throughout the organization, nationally and locally, that a granted wish not only provides promise and pleasure to the children, but also unites their friends, neighbors, and

communities. The collaborations forged by Make-A-Wish transform entire families as much as they do the individual children whose dreams come true.

The Trumbull staff is especially aware of this special dynamic, partially because their enduring success has put them in touch with so many children, so many friends, and so many neighbors and communities.

"I am more than happy to say that we have granted every eligible wish that we've been asked to grant," notes Pam Keough. "We've never had to turn one down." That is not to say that the future will be without its challenges. Given these difficult and uncertain times, maintaining such a stellar track record will require continued hard work, dedication, cooperation, and perhaps even a little luck. But Keough and her Trumbull staff are committed to going the distance, and they remain entirely optimistic.

"Most of our referrals for wishes come from the families themselves. Many also come from social workers and from the nurses and doctors at Connecticut hospitals where these youngsters unfortunately have to spend a lot of time," explains Lisa Brown, program director. With such unwavering appeals, it is unambiguously clear how important it is to overcome even the most dire financial and logistical confrontations, in order to continue to grant wishes.

The entire staff at Make-A-Wish Connecticut is laser focused on that objective.

"Our chapter has grown over the years, and as a result, we have had to add new people," observes Carin Buckman, marketing communications and digital manager. Staff members at the regional Make-A-Wish have come from many different professions – from other non-profit organizations, and sometimes even from medical device and healthcare service companies. That makes sense, since many of those professionals have first-hand knowledge of all the various kinds of diagnostic and treatment efforts required by these children. For many of them across Connecticut, these efforts can be quite wearying, which makes dreaming and wish-making all the more fulfilling.

All Make-A-Wish children, staffers, and volunteers

"... it is unambiguously clear how important it is to overcome even the most dire financial and logistical confrontations, in order to continue to grant wishes.

—Lisa Brown





OPENING DOORS: Cameron enjoys the new Unified Lounge at Newtown High School - a "wish" come true thanks to Make-A-Wish Connecticut.

Connecticut team is always eager to put out the call for more volunteers who can assist in many ways to turn dreams and wishes into reality.

"Before COVID, 70 percent of the wishes we received were travel-related – like Disney World and other exciting destinations," says Lisa Brown. "Now they include a lot of local shopping sprees, room

around the world have Christopher Greicius to thank for getting the ball rolling in Phoenix 40 years ago. When Christopher was seven and being treated for terminal Stage IV leukemia, a U.S. Customs officer named Tommy Austin – a friend of Christopher's mother – heard that his dream was to become a police officer, but would likely not survive to the age of eight. Austin and several of his colleagues commissioned a police uniform in Christopher's size, scheduled a helicopter ride on a police chopper, and arranged for the boy to take a police academy exam. Christopher, who died in May 1980 – two days after putting on his uniform and pinning on his badge – had the pleasure and pride of knowing his life's grandest wish had come true.

It is in this same spirit that Make-A-Wish Connecticut continues its mission. To help with the promotion of that mission, with the fundraising needed to support it, and with the volunteering effort necessary to actually make wishes come true, the chapter works tirelessly on a series of projects and events. These activities have such self-explanatory titles as the Walk for Wishes, the Taste of Wishes, the Trailblaze Challenge, Wish Night, the Evening of Wishes Gala, and more. Even during the pandemic, many events – a bit scaled-back and carefully arranged with an eye on safety and well-being – were still held, some virtually. When the pandemic subsides, the group's event calendar will once again be as broad and active as it has been for the last three-and-a-half decades.

All wishes have challenges of their own, especially these days, when so many contractors and other local professionals – people who in the past have used their skills to make wishes come true – have pandemic-related trials and tribulations of their own that affect their ability to come aboard to the extent they'd prefer. The Make-A-Wish

makeovers, and the sort of wishes that can be restricted to the area and even endure far longer than any destination visit." That, she notes, speaks to the fact that so many of the young people involved handle the new social reality – and its many limitations – with maturity far beyond their years.

One of the clearest examples of that is the recent wish of a student from Newtown with cystic fibrosis. She is very involved in her school's Unified Arts Program, which focuses on opportunities to develop social and leadership skills in a safe, friendly environment. The wish of this student, who enjoys wonderfully close relationships with her high school classmates, was for a new Unified Lounge to be built in her high school. She wanted her friends in the program to be able to enjoy a modern, comfortable lounge between classes day after day.

"These kids could wish for anything," Lisa Brown says with more than just a little pride and astonishment. "Anything! But she, like so many others, just want to give back for what they've been given, even when it may seem to others that they've been given so little in the bigger picture. These children are so special in so many ways."

Which is precisely why Make-A-Wish Connecticut does whatever it can to remain so special – in so many ways.

For more information on Make-A-Wish Connecticut and how you can help, visit wish.org/ct/ways-help-us or call 1-203-261-9044 [toll-free, 1-877-203-9474].

Connecticut journalist Joel Samberg has also profiled and written for the YMCA of Greater Hartford, the Gengras Center at the University of Saint Joseph, Ethel Walker School, The Children's Center of Hamden, and several other schools and organizations in the state.



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Conversations for a
Better Way Forward

More Than Skin Deep

Cosmetic and laser dermatologic treatments help patients put their best face forward

By **CAROL LATTER** / Photography courtesy of UConn Health

In the past, many people who were unhappy with the way their skin looked from a cosmetic standpoint were forced to suffer in silence. In some cases, they didn't know enough about the options that were available or, if they did, simply couldn't afford them, since the vast majority are not covered by medical insurance. Some were unable to take the time off from work that was recommended or required for recovery – or worried that the results would not justify the cost, since some interventions were less successful than others.

Today, with the introduction of breakthrough products, innovative techniques, and state-of-the-art technologies that offer great effectiveness, laser and cosmetic dermatology has moved very much into the mainstream. And it is making a huge difference in the lives of patients, improving their physical and emotional well-being without a significant amount of downtime. In 2018, almost 18 million Americans had a cosmetic procedure or intervention, and the numbers continue to grow each year.

The Department of Dermatology at UConn Health has become a leader in this burgeoning field. In addition to providing medical-based care, such as performing Mohs surgery for skin cancer and treating dermatologic diseases, its fellowship-trained, board-certified physicians offer the newest and most effective laser and cosmetic treatments for everything from wrinkles, discoloration, and sagging skin to vein reduction, scar revision, contour sculpting, and permanent hair removal.

Hao Feng, M.D., M.H.S., FAAD – one of two procedural dermatologists in the department along with Maritza Perez, M.D., FAAD – says as faculty members of a university hospital, he and his colleagues use science-based therapies and treatments to give patients the benefits of the latest research and innovation in healthcare.

“We have the expertise and the tools to really help people, no matter what the issue,” he says. “They don't need to travel to New York or Boston. We deliver excellent care that rivals what is offered in the major cities.”

Dr. Perez, who has worked in cosmetic dermatology for more than two decades and has performed and authored countless journal articles about a wide array of dermatological interventions, agrees that when it comes to doing cosmetic

procedures, expertise is key. “The compendium – the whole package of how to rejuvenate a face – is not only based on lasers, Botox, or fillers. It's knowing how to analyze the face and knowing the best way to improve a patient's look. And that comes with a lot of experience.”

She notes that UConn is very fortunate to have such skilled physicians, not only in Dermatology but in its other departments as well. “It's important to have the right quality of professionals to take care of your patients,” she says.

Members of UConn's Dermatology team have an impressive arsenal of tools at their disposal.

Surface-level treatments include wrinkle-fighting serums, cryosurgery to eliminate benign lesions, and painless removal of skin tags. In microdermabrasion, also known as the “lunchtime peel,” crystals and suction are used to exfoliate the top layers of damaged skin, promoting the formation of new, smoother skin with no discomfort or downtime.

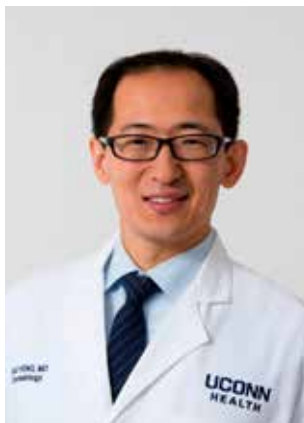
Chemical peels – which not only exfoliate skin but stimulate collagen using alpha-hydroxy acids – are great for making wrinkles, fine lines, and pigmentation less visible, improving skin texture, and minimizing the appearance of active acne and scarring.

Lasers can eliminate unwanted blood vessels, fine lines and wrinkles, scars, discoloration like rosacea and brown spots on the face, and sun damage on the neck and chest. Blu-light treatments can remove precancerous lesions. Lasers can also be used to permanently remove hair and tattoos.

Injectables are also popular. For instance, botulinum toxin (known by the trade name Botox) is not only used to eliminate or reduce wrinkles, but can make hands look younger, reduce excessive underarm sweating, and improve the appearance of the neck when injected along the jawline. It can also promote a better appearance for patients who feel their gums are too prominent when they smile.

Fillers, meanwhile, can help to correct facial wrinkles and folds, scarring, skin depressions, and lip lines, as well as correct volume loss in the face and hands. Patients with spider veins in their legs may opt for sclerotherapy, in which a liquid is injected into the veins to make them less visible. Kybella injections are used to eliminate the fat cells that contribute to a double chin.

Minor surgery, small amounts of liposuction in certain areas,



Dr. Hao Feng



Dr. Maritza Perez



BEST FACE FORWARD:

Patients seeking cosmetic improvements may be treated with botulinum toxin, fillers, chemical peels, or prescription-strength serums – or with lasers that reduce redness or resurface and tighten skin. Minor surgical interventions are also available.

Photo courtesy of UConn Health

HEALTH AND BEAUTY:

The field of dermatology – which includes medical and cosmetic subcategories – helps patients not only improve the appearance of their skin but ensure that their skin health is optimized.

UConn Health's highly skilled dermatologists offer patients the best care from a medical as well as aesthetic standpoint. *Photo courtesy of UConn Health*



and microneedling with radiofrequency are also available.

Dr. Perez says often, the best approach involves not just a single type of treatment but several. “Combination treatments can offer the best outcome, the least amount of downtime, and sometimes the lowest investment,” she says. “For example, for some patients, if you use the right combination of Botox, fillers, and lasers, you can get the improvement of ... not a facelift, but almost a facelift. And you can do it in one sitting. When you combine treatments, it’s a beauty, because the improvements are exponential rather than additive.”

A PERSONALIZED APPROACH

No matter what type of result a patient hopes to achieve, the guidance provided by UConn’s dermatology team is invaluable. “There’s a dizzying amount of information on the internet, including a lot of advertising,” says Dr. Feng. “It’s very difficult for the consumer to navigate all of that, and to know if any of it really works. A big part of my job – and what I love doing for a patient – is to provide them with the correct information. To say, ‘This is what we can realistically do for you,’ and help guide them through the process.”

UConn’s dermatologists take into account not only the potential effectiveness of a treatment but its suitability to the individual patient and their situation. “We want to understand what kind of results patients are seeking, and what kind of downtime they can have,” says Dr. Feng. “Then we consider what kind of potential harm there may be. For example, if you have dark skin, your skin is going to be more prone to side effects and complications than someone who has Caucasian skin. As a team, we really want our patients have an excellent experience. We’ll never recommend things that will not work or is not right for them.”

RIGHT PROCEDURES, RIGHT PROVIDER

One thing many patients may not be aware of is that it’s critically important not only to select the right products or procedures, but the right provider. Dr. Feng explains that while various cosmetic treatments can have marvelous results, they can also be dangerous in the hands of a provider who is inadequately trained to use them safely or does not know how to deal with complications when they occur.

“I’ve seen multiple patients who’ve gotten procedures done and suffered long-term consequences. One example is a young college student who was bothered by excess, unwanted hair on her arms and had a treatment that resulted in very visible burns and scars. We had to do a lot of work to help correct that,” he recalls. He also knows of patients who had filler accidentally injected into a blood vessel, causing serious complications. “Unfortunately, the injector did not recognize this serious complication and the patient never received time-sensitive treatment that could have prevented her facial scars.”

“Our goal is to never have a patient be in that position in the first place,” he says.

“I really urge consumers to look at the training and the expertise of anyone that they’re considering getting cosmetic and laser energy-based treatment from. You want someone who really knows what they’re doing, who can take care of you from the beginning to attain your goals, and who has the right devices and options that fit your needs – not just what’s convenient for the person who’s treating you. And I think

that’s something that makes UConn stand out compared to other places in the area, and really in the entire state.”

At UConn, he notes, a complication is “a very rare event, but it can happen. However, we are trained to recognize and reverse any side effects very quickly, with no negative results. You really have to know what you’re doing, to minimize complications and use these products safely.”

Because UConn’s dermatologists are also expert in treating medical issues, they are able to identify and treat potentially life-threatening skin lesions, like melanoma.

Finding a concerning skin lesion during a cosmetic consultation is not uncommon, Dr. Perez says. Since joining UConn from private practice 18 months ago, “I’ve removed five melanomas in a given week, so we’re saving lives here on an everyday basis. But on top of that, we’re improving the appearance of people who may be feeling self-conscious or depressed about the way they look.”

When it comes to offering medical care, Dr. Perez takes a lot of satisfaction in helping people, regardless of their situation. She says one of the reasons that she shifted from private practice to UConn Health is because she wants to give back to the community. “We take care of all patients, regardless of their insurance status.”

You might say that both physicians bring to their positions something of a world view.

Dr. Perez was born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico. She went to college at 15, finishing a bachelor’s degree in biology with a minor in chemistry in just three years, and finished medical school at 23. After completing a fellowship in immunology and marrying a fellow physician, she spent several years in research at Yale before completing another fellowship, this time in dermatology, and subsequently went into private practice. Her twin daughters are also in medicine.

Dr. Feng, who was born in China, emigrated to the U.S. with his family at the age of 10 and lived in Florida and California before earning his medical degree at Yale, followed by a year-long internship at Yale New Haven Hospital. After completing his dermatologic residency at NYU, he stayed in Manhattan for a fellowship in surgery, laser surgery, and cosmetic dermatology, returning to Connecticut in 2019.

Both are delighted to be at UConn. “I always wanted to have a career where I can not only provide excellent patient care, but also really teach and help mentor the next generation of physicians to be top-notch dermatologists,” says Dr. Feng. “Also, being at an academic center, you’re surrounded by so many brilliant people, both those with a lot of experience and really great young minds. We’re building and creating something here that’s really exciting to me.” ■

Drs. Perez and Feng discuss advanced cosmetic dermatology treatment options on the November episode of the UConn Health Pulse podcast. Hear it at <https://h.uconn.edu/derm-podcast>.

Carol Latter is the editor of Seasons Magazines and lives in Simsbury.



NEW PSORIASIS CENTER OPENS IN THE NEW YEAR.

Complete Care for Your Psoriasis All In One Place

Psoriasis is a chronic skin condition caused by an overactive immune system that affects people of all ages. The symptoms can include dry, flaking skin, inflammation, and discolored skin patches.

The brand new, state-of-the-art Psoriasis Center at UConn Health provides complete care for your psoriasis and offers various treatments, including hand and foot baths, phototherapy, and injectable medications on-site. Our dedicated team from Dermatology brings years of experience to psoriasis care and is committed to working toward your treatment, whether you are newly diagnosed or have chronic psoriasis.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE
NEW PSORIASIS CENTER, VISIT
[HEALTH.UCONN.EDU/PSORIASIS.](https://health.uconn.edu/psoriasis)

UCONN
HEALTH
DERMATOLOGY

Perspective 2020

By DENNIS HOUSE / Photography by STAN GODLEWSKI

2020 was going to be epic. A powerful repeat-digit year that we last had in 1919, but this was extra special – a double-digit year, not seen since the Middle Ages in 1010.

As 2020 approached, the economy was booming. People were planning 2020-themed weddings and special trips, and those graduating in the class of 2020 felt their group was extra special, all because of the numbers 20-20.

Here we are ringing in 2021, hoping there is never again a year like the one we just trudged through. We cried, we worried, we grieved, and we changed the way we lived, perhaps forever.

For many of us, 2020 began with a pall of sadness. Connecticut was still processing the sudden death of Denise D'Ascenzo, the legendary newswoman, my co-anchor and "TV wife" for a quarter century. Her shocking death triggered what was said to be the largest outpouring of collective grief in Connecticut for a single person since the death of beloved governor Ella Grasso in 1981. For more than 30 years, Denise was a constant on televisions in our state, a beacon of warmth during the biggest news events of our time. As Gayle King put it, "this wasn't supposed to happen. Denise was always supposed to be here."

As 2020 began, I had to adapt to a new phase in my career, one as a solo anchor on the evening news. I didn't take any extra time off. I'm fiercely loyal and felt I needed to be there on the news for the viewers, who would write to me saying that seeing me brought them some comfort, peace, and a sense of trust – that everything was going to be okay after such a devastating loss.

It was a time of tremendous sadness for me as I helped plan the memorial while responding to the cards, emails, Facebook messages, and gifts from distraught

viewers. It wasn't easy, but Denise would have wanted me to be a strong, dependable leader. I spoke to her husband and daughter almost daily during this time, while Kara and I monitored our children, who were still trying to comprehend the death of "Auntie Denise." I found solace in deep conversations with some of my co-workers who were really having a tough time coping with her loss. Leading our team and our state through this bereavement was my top priority and what Denise would have expected. I felt her guiding me through that awful month. Still do.

Her public memorial was held on January 29, one day before her birthday, at the Connecticut Convention Center. The state united in mourning that day, at what would be one of the last big events before Connecticut and the world changed.

In late January, we started hearing a little about coronavirus, a deadly contagion overseas, but many people weren't paying close attention. The drumbeat of stories continued through February and increased, reaching a peak in March as the threat of a deadly pandemic grew

closer.

On March 20th, the governor ordered non-essential businesses to close. Gyms, restaurants, and schools were shuttered. Students came home from college, young professionals fled New York and Boston and beyond, to live with mom and dad back home in Connecticut. Many New Yorkers with the means to do so moved their family operations to country houses in Litchfield or beach cottages on the shoreline.

Supermarkets were vastly different. There was a run on toilet paper and cleaning products. Package stores were allowed to remain open, and they experienced brisk business. Students started what we know now as remote learning. We learned about Zoom, Webex, Google Meet, and Houseparty.

On March 20th, the governor ordered non-essential businesses to close. Gyms, restaurants, and schools were shuttered. Students came home from college, young professionals fled New York and Boston and beyond, to live with mom and dad back home in Connecticut.



HOME, BUT NOT ALONE:
Since leaving WFSB after 28 years at the station, Dennis House has enjoyed spending quality time with his family and savoring each moment with his wife, Kara, and their two kids.

COVID-19 was a real thing, and it was killing people in Connecticut. By the end of April, more than 2,000 people had died. The number of infections increased daily, and we witnessed field hospitals being hastily assembled across the state for the overflow of patients. A little over two months after “Be Not Afraid” was played at the convention center during Denise’s memorial, people were afraid, as the mammoth complex was transformed by the National Guard into a makeshift hospital.

There was the economic fallout. Layoffs, furloughs, reduction of services, shortages, and closings became a part of Connecticut life. There were stories of people who lost loved ones to COVID, then lost their livelihoods as their businesses went under, never to reopen. In some cases, people died alone, their family not allowed to visit them as coronavirus stole their last breath. The grieving had to be done at home. Funerals weren’t allowed, and neither were social gatherings. There were no attractions open to take your attention away from the grim situation, no gyms to burn off steam or malls to pass the time.

There were so many unanswered questions. I helped launch a special edition of Face the State for Thursday nights with Governor Lamont and me, that became known as Thursdays with Ned and Den. On two of those broadcasts, the governor told our viewers if they had a problem with their unemployment claim, to “contact Dennis and he’ll let us know about it.” My inbox and voicemail blew up. I had so many people reach out to me with heartbreaking stories of jobs lost, mounting bills, and mouths to feed. I helped them navigate the bureaucracy of the state Department of Labor. The notes of thanks I received from people after their benefits were approved were a highlight of 2020.

Through these dark times, Connecticut began to shine.

We saw the state come together in unprecedented fashion. Social media was filled with messages of love for healthcare workers, first responders, restaurant employees, and those who worked at grocery stores. Those people were working extra hours on the front lines of the pandemic. We cooked more and had more family dinners. Families played games and went on hikes. Bike sales soared. Home improvement stores saw an uptick in business as people invested in fixing up their abodes. That room that was last painted in 1995? It finally got done. Free time for many was plentiful.

We embraced masks and the social distancing protocols. As spring turned to summer, we saw our state become a model of how to manage COVID-19.

The experts told us the metrics were heading down, and we started to live a little. Not a complete return to normalcy, but restaurants and stores re-opened. Cities and towns allowed the expansion of outdoor dining into their streets. Our hair got longer as barbers and salons remained under quarantine.

We learned Connecticut was actually growing. Many of those people who fled big cities are still here. I have some new neighbors who bolted Brooklyn and love it here, and the real estate market in parts of Connecticut is red hot. My realtor told me of a house in West Hartford that listed for \$625,000 and sold for \$775,000 after a bidding war. In October, Governor Lamont told me

more than 25,000 people have moved to Connecticut since the pandemic began and the moving trucks continue to come in.

A funny thing happened to me as the pandemic progressed. Connecticut is, of course, my home and I’m happy here, but I found myself really falling deeply in love with our great state, and my desire to see it survive and succeed intensified during this crisis. My commitment to inform, educate, and help Nutmeg Nation (did I just create that term?) grew stronger as the negative news increased. I found myself more

energized as I would head into work knowing much needed to be done. I helped viewers on my day off and decided to give back a little. I picked up a stack of Dunkin’ gift cards to hand to people I would see at traffic lights with signs indicating they were down on their luck. I wanted to do my part.

As the summer came to an end, like so many people in Connecticut, I lost my job too – laid off after 28 years. Fall arrived, and we learned about major cutbacks at several companies; state health officials warned about a second surge, and it came. The state was forced to roll back some of its reopening plans and saw the COVID numbers start to creep up. At the time of the writing of this article, families were planning smaller Thanksgiving dinners and winter school sports had been cancelled. There is talk that visits to Santa Claus will be through plexiglass. No sitting on the big man’s lap.

If you had told me on December 1, 2019 of all the major changes that would come in 2020, I would have laughed hysterically and called you crazy.

I would have said: “Forget it. Tom Brady is not going to play for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.”

I would have been wrong.

So I know that there is no guarantee of what the coming year will bring. Still, I’m an optimist. I’m a positive vibes guy and know that better times are ahead

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HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS: Dennis House and Kara Sundlun relax with their children, Helena and Julian.

for our state and for me. My loyalty to this state runs deep, and I believe Connecticut is a fantastic place to live. I'm confident that 2021 will be a great year. There are signs of new shops and eateries opening, a major development project just got underway next to the home of the Hartford Yard Goats, and all of our new fellow residents are spending money in our state, their new home. Two pharmaceutical companies recently announced new vaccines – both of them reported to be 95 percent effective. It's the breakthrough we've all

been waiting for.

There's no question in my mind that we will overcome this unprecedented global challenge. In Connecticut, the Land of Steady Habits, we will hang tough and continue to do what we've always done – pull together, help one another, and lift each other up as we begin to glimpse the light at the end of the tunnel.

That's something we can all do, to make 2021 a better year.

That's what Denise would have done. ■

Chocolate Indulgences

**Homemade truffles and specialty drinks
can make any day more festive!**

By AMY S. WHITE

Did you know that eating chocolate can make you happy? It's not a myth! Cacao contains a number of compounds that scientists say have mood-lifting properties. One such compound is the natural antidepressant phenethylamine. Another is tryptophan, an amino acid that the brain uses to make serotonin, a neurotransmitter that produces feelings of happiness. And that little bit of caffeine cacao contains is always a nice pick-me-up.

So, if you require scientific justification for your chocolate cravings, now you have it. Now get into your kitchen, gather a couple of ingredients you probably already have, and conjure up your own bite-sized balls of happiness in the form of homemade chocolate truffles.

Originating in France, truffles were named for their earthy resemblance to the highly valued edible fungus that grows in forests throughout Europe. A confection named after something so rare and expensive must be difficult to make, right? Not one bit. The heart of every chocolate truffle is ganache, a fancy French term for a very simple thing – chocolate that has been melted with warmed cream. That's right, a mere two ingredients is the base for every bliss-filled bite.

But here's the best part. That ganache? You can flavor it. With just about anything. Liqueurs. Extracts. Spices. Teas. Herbs. Citrus zests. Shuffle your favorite flavors around and take those taste buds on one unique trip. Once the cream-and-chocolate mixture has been chilled to firmness, all you have to do is hand-roll it into balls and adorn each ball in your choice of coating. You can

even use it to join in on this year's hottest cold-weather trend, cocoa bombs. See below!

I know you're excited to start candy-making, but before you jump to the recipe, here are a few key tips.

- Use a 2:1 ratio of chocolate to cream, that is, heavy cream and whatever chocolate makes you happy. When I'm trying to be fancy, I use "good" chocolate that is more than 60% cacao, but if the chocolate craving strikes or I need an easy hostess gift, I've been known to use regular old semi-sweet chocolate chips.

- Take care not to scald the cream. Heat it until bubbles start to form on the edges and it just begins to steam.

- Add your flavoring agent after you've taken the cream off the heat. If you're using liqueur, extract, or a ground/powdered spice (like cayenne pepper or nutmeg), just stir it in. If you are using a spice that isn't already ground (like star anise or a cinnamon stick), an herb (mint, lavender, rosemary), citrus zest, or tea leaves (a teabag or loose tea), place it in the warm cream and allow it to steep for 10 minutes, then strain it out.

- Give the ganache time to chill until it is firm enough to form into balls. Truffles are very hard to roll when they are melting messily all over your warm hands.

- Adorn your truffles with something that is a perfect pairing to their flavor – cocoa powder, chopped nuts, sprinkles, powdered sugar, and even a light sprinkle of sea salt are some of my favorites.

- Make these now! Wintertime in Connecticut is the perfect time to make truffles. If you run out of refrigerator space, use nature's "freezer" to cool and/or store them (in airtight containers, of course). I've been



known to store them inside the grill on my deck.

- Bring truffles up to room temperature before serving/sharing/devouring.

I hope by now you're convinced that making chocolate truffles is almost as easy as getting in the car and buying them. My basic recipe makes about two dozen of these melt-in-your-mouth treats – enough for you to enjoy with some left over to gift away. Share the homemade happiness! We could all use a little right now.

BASIC CHOCOLATE TRUFFLE RECIPE

Note: Makes about two dozen; to make more or fewer, use a 2:1 ratio of chocolate to cream.

Ingredients:

2 cups semi-sweet chocolate chips

1 cup heavy cream

Flavoring, to taste (for liqueur, about an ounce; for extracts or ground spices, about a teaspoon; for chopped fresh herbs or citrus zests, about a tablespoon; for tea, about 2 tea bags' worth – the more you add, the stronger the flavor will be)

Finishing touch (a small bowl's worth of chocolate sprinkles, cinnamon sugar, powdered sugar, chopped nuts, cocoa powder, or whatever you can think up!)

Step 1 – Make and chill the ganache:

Warm cream in a small saucepan until bubbles start to form around the edges and it just begins to steam. Turn off heat and add desired flavoring. Allow to sit for 10 minutes to infuse; strain if needed. Meanwhile, place chocolate chips in a medium bowl. Pour warm cream over chocolate and stir until fully incorporated, smooth, and glossy. Cover with a lid or plastic wrap and allow to chill for at least two hours, until firm enough to roll into balls.

Step 2 – Hand-roll into balls:

Scoop chilled ganache out of the bowl with a tablespoon. Roll between your hands to form small ball-shaped truffles. Set truffles on a parchment-lined cookie sheet or baking tray and chill for another hour or so.

Step 3 – Decorate:

Roll chilled truffles in desired coating.

Step 4 – Storing and serving:

Keep truffles chilled in an airtight container. Bring to room temperature for serving.

DIY HOT COCOA "BOMBS"

Follow the basic recipe above, but roll balls two to three times the size you would for a truffle. After chilling, roll in cocoa powder and freeze. To serve, drop one "bomb" in a mug of hot milk. Top with marshmallows or whipped cream and enjoy.

Chocolate



A FEW TRUFFLE FLAVOR IDEAS TO GET YOU GOING

- Maple Toffee – Infuse cream with maple liqueur, syrup, or extract, and roll in Heath bar bits.
- Amaretto Joy – Infuse cream with almond extract or Amaretto liqueur, and roll in toasted coconut flakes OR infuse with coconut rum and roll in chopped almonds.
- Mexican Cacao – Infuse cream with cayenne pepper and roll in cinnamon sugar.
- Chocolate Orange – Infuse cream with orange liqueur or orange zest, and roll in chocolate sprinkles or cocoa powder.
- Lavender Chip – Infuse cream with edible lavender flowers (be sure to strain out), and roll in mini chocolate chips.
- Earl Grey – Infuse cream with Earl Grey tea leaves and roll in powdered sugar.
- Peppermint Dream – Infuse cream with peppermint extra, liqueur, or mint leaves, and roll in chocolate sprinkles or cocoa powder.
- Indian Kiss – Infuse cream with rosewater and roll in chopped pistachios.

Late

Photo by Mary Quinn

PERFECT PAIRINGS: HOT CHOCOLATE COCKTAILS

You may be an old hand at making hot chocolate for the kids, but how about raising the bar ... to adult height? With cold, wintry days upon us, these chocolate cocktails can give your spirits a lift.

BASIC HOT CHOCOLATE RECIPE

Ingredients:

- ½ cup sugar or sugar replacement (i.e. stevia)**
- ¼ cup cocoa**
- 1 pinch salt**
- 4 cups milk (1 qt.)**
- ¾ tsp. vanilla extract**
- ⅓ cup boiling water**

Directions:

Mix sugar, cocoa, and salt in medium saucepan. Stir in water. Bring to boil over medium heat, stirring constantly. Boil and stir for 2 minutes.

Add milk. Stir and heat until hot – do not boil. Remove from heat and add vanilla. Beat with whisk until foamy. Makes about six 6-ounce servings. Double the recipe if desired.

You can serve this to the kids, of course. But for an adult-only version, read on.

MIXING IT UP

In a heavy, footed glass or Mason jar mug, measure out 1½ oz. to 2¼ oz. of your favorite liquor or liqueur, or use a combination:

Rum (coconut, pineapple, or spiced)

Amaretto

Peppermint, butterscotch, or peach Schnapps

Frangelico

Kahlua

Irish cream

Drambuie

Chocolate liqueur

Fill the glass with hot chocolate. Stir. Then, use your imagination to customize your grown-up treat:

Top with marshmallows or whipped cream (liquor-infused or plain)

Drizzle with your choice of chocolate, butterscotch, or caramel syrup

If desired, sprinkle with cinnamon, toasted coconut, crushed peppermint candy, crushed nuts, chocolate chips, or crushed chocolate bar



**WITH COLD,
WINTRY DAYS
UPON US, THESE
CHOCOLATE
COCKTAILS
CAN GIVE YOUR
SPIRITS A LIFT.**



Staying Connected

Technology helps seniors keep in touch, active during pandemic

By TERESA M. PELHAM

For the first seven years of her grandson's life, Marye Gail Harrison would visit him in New Hampshire for a weekend once a month. When

COVID-19 hit, she figured her visits with him would be put on hold, at least temporarily. Now several months later, her relationship with him is stronger than ever, and they "visit" with each other for an hour, five days a week.

Thanks to Zoom, Harrison and her grandson, Ron, enter a world of make-believe, complete with costumes and props. It's a part of his at-home schooling that will most definitely stay with him long after 2020 is in our rearview.

Harrison begins each Zoom call by asking, "What's going on in the neighborhood today?" Ron then comes up with a scenario involving a few of his stuffed animals, and the two take it from there. They both have plenty of dress-up clothes, hats, and masks, and the hour goes by in a flash.

"We're basically doing extemporaneous theater," says the 79-year old resident of Seabury, an active life plan community in Bloomfield. "It's a little like 'Mister Rogers' Neighborhood,' a neighborhood of all of his buddies and allies, along with other nefarious characters."

The pair has been at this since his elementary school closed in mid-March, with no summer break.

"For someone my age, COVID is very scary," she says. "To have this

intense experience with this child who I want to live for, and who I want to see grow up, it's blown my mind, frankly. In this time of great angst, this [visiting virtually] has been a source of great joy."

Harrison has learned quite a few computer skills that are helping her stay engaged. She learned how to set up an email listserv for an art group based at Seabury and is now its administrator. And she learned some pretty complicated computer skills in order to incorporate artwork into an online service for the Unitarian Society of Hartford.

"I thought I was really hot because I could email an attachment, I could text, and I have a Facebook account," she says. "I'm not a pro now, but give me enough time and I can figure it out."

We can officially stop making fun of senior adults' inability to use computers and handheld devices. It's estimated that more than 70 percent of seniors are online, and since that segment of the population has been especially hard-hit by the virus, it shouldn't be surprising to learn that many older Americans are not only keeping up with technology but embracing it. Many seniors are also coming up with new ways to stay busy and pursue hobbies they enjoyed before 2020.

A recent report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine states that isolated and lonely adults have a 50% higher chance of developing dementia, a 29% higher chance of coronary heart disease, and a

32% higher chance of having a stroke – and are at a higher risk of hospitalization.

Singers like Priscilla Hurley, who lives at McLean senior living community in Simsbury, have had to temporarily give up that hobby, since singing is one of the highest-risk activities people can do, in terms of spreading the coronavirus.

But Hurley belongs to the Hartford Chorale, which meets virtually every month. Along with some 25 other members, she recently played Jukebox Bingo online, and is proud to announce that she won the first game. The organization also figured out how to do virtual group singing, with members recording two sections of Handel's Messiah on their cellphones and editing them to perfection.

Hurley, who declines to give her age, says she was surprised at how much entertainment is available through your computer. She has been hearing a different opera or musical every night, streamed by the Metropolitan Opera and the Goodspeed Opera House. And she's preparing to participate in a virtual murder mystery with the Theatre Guild of Simsbury.

"Singing is going to be one of the last things to come back," she says. "Singers are spitting all over the place. But we're doing what we can to stay busy and active."

Just down the road at Duncaster in Bloomfield, Susan Aller is busy running a memoir writing club that used to



WHAT A CARD: During the pandemic, Marye Gail Harrison has gotten creative when it comes to spending time with her grandson. The two chat and play games, via Zoom, complete with costumes and props.



TECH TOGETHERNESS: Susan Aller, who lives at Duncaster in Bloomfield, enjoys a Zoom gathering with friends and family.

meet in person every Monday morning to read each other's writing around a big table and share feedback.

All but one of the 20 club members have stayed involved through email. Aller regularly provides the group with a prompt to get the creative juices flowing. She recently read a New York Times article about six-word stories. In addition to printing some of residents' own six-word stories in "Thistle," Duncaster's monthly literary magazine, we've shared some here (see box.)

Aller, 86, has worked as a professional writer for many years, having written more than a dozen books.

"I've been computer literate for a long time but I'm still learning, and as

I learn, I teach other people to get up to speed," she says.

Duncaster employs two full-time IT professionals who are available to help residents with any tech-related issues.

"When you've got a computer problem, you just call Walter or Eric," Aller says. "It's worth living at Duncaster just for that."


Aller also is active in a children's book writers' group in West Hartford, which meets via Zoom twice monthly, in addition to meeting with Duncaster's board of directors as a resident representative once a month.

She has family living in Paris and New York City, and she regularly catches up online with them.

"We all complain about and criticize young people with their faces buried in their phones," Aller says. "Suddenly we are that generation. We have to be."

While Aller has decided she's not a fan of telehealth appointments, she has embraced getting items from Whole Foods delivered through Amazon Prime, and she found a distant cousin during lockdown through Ancestry.com.

"Boredom sets in when you don't have a goal," she says. "The people who thought they could get through life without adapting to technology are really suffering now from the inability to connect with others. We're making lemonade out of lemons." 🍋



“ I’ve been computer literate for a long time but I’m still learning, and as I learn, I teach other people to get up to speed. ”

—Susan Aller

SIX-WORD STORIES

By the Duncaster
Memoir Writers

I believe this too shall pass!

Youth joins elders happy
being alive.

New baby coming. Another
family generation.

Missing my life companion
madly. Memories!!

Heart full, arms empty.
Hugging tears.

Once upon a long loong time ...

COVID family visits: Skype,
Facetime, Zooom

Holocaust deniers, racism
deniers, COVID deniers

Writing cleanses the brain
and soul.

Strawberries, cukes, tomatoes,
rich harvest.

Sweet baby – wish to hold you.

Embraces and kisses,
long time ago.

Eyes only – don’t touch.
Solo dinners.

Take a walk. Call a friend.

How long will this go on?

Joy – weekly Zoom meeting
with daughters

Family faces, good friends,
God’s blessings.



To Give & To Receive

Gifts for your loved ones ...
or a treat for yourself.

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Gift Card

Want to give the gift of fun on the slopes, but not exactly sure what the skier and rider on your list really wants? A gift card from Mount Southington provides a flexible option that lets them choose. Visit mountsouthington.com to get your gift cards today!



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If you are looking for American made, unique gifts to give for the holidays, America The Beautiful Country Store is here for you! We proudly carry one-of-a-kind local and regional gifts to fit everyone's budget. This year we are offering before and after hours shopping for groups of 4-8 people, FaceTime shopping with Kellee, and beautiful gift baskets. Curbside pickup is available and we offer free gift wrapping.

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Safety in Numbers

Skiing offers a socially distanced tonic for the “Pandemic Blues”

By JOHN TORSIELLO

Golf and skiing don't seem to have much in common, besides the fact that both are done in the great outdoors. But in the year of COVID-19, that similarity can make all the difference in the world.

Some Connecticut golf courses this year reported increases of 30 to 40 percent in the number of rounds played, mainly due to the fact that the sport was one of the few that could meet government and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for social distancing and is played, obviously, in an open air setting. The state's ski area operators are counting on that same combination of factors to bring people to the slopes and woods this winter, hopefully with smiles on their faces – until they need to put on their masks, that is.

“I think that the concept between golf

and skiing is very similar,” Ulla Jacobs, marketing director for Ski Sundown in New Hartford, says. “Snow sports are naturally experienced at a social distance. People tend to spread out and pick their own path to ski or ride the mountain. It's a very individual sport. Because of the cold temperatures, most skiers and snowboarders are used to face and hand coverings while they're outside. And with our new socially distanced lift policies, there's nothing to keep you from enjoying the fresh air and mountain views.”

Brian McCloskey, guest services and marketing manager at Mount Southington Ski Area in Southington, believes people want to be able to get outside and get some fresh air, especially during the sometimes long, dark days of winter. “With skiing, you're typically wearing gloves and face coverings because of the cold temperatures – and you're usually

trying keep your distance from others while you're on the hill to avoid making contact with another skier or snowboarder,” he says. “We feel skiing is a great way to get outside and exercise while we are in this pandemic.”

Jim Shockley, branding and equipment director at Mohawk Mountain Ski Area in Cornwall, says that “in these trying times, people need an escape,” a reprieve from the never-ending pandemic news cycle. “If we can offer our customers a small sense of normalcy while they're doing something that they love – or have never done before – the impact will be felt physically and emotionally.”

Winding Trails is a several hundred-acre cross-country ski area in Farmington that is a refuge for residents during the winter. Scott Brown, executive director, is confident the area can provide a safe environment for skiing. “Being outdoors on 12.5 miles

SAFETY ON THE SLOPES: Ski Sundown has new socially distanced lift policies, to ensure “there's nothing to keep you from enjoying the fresh air and mountain views.”



ENJOYING THE GREAT OUTDOORS: Powder Ridge has reconfigured its indoor space and added a heated seasonal tent for extra outdoor seating and event space.

of trails is the perfect environment to enjoy nature, get exercise, and be safe,” he says.

Brown notes that skis are essentially built-in social distancing barriers. “You can’t get with six feet of another person. Also, with 380 acres, you can certainly find space to be alone.” The potential issue that Winding Trails may have involves interaction in its ski center. People who rent skis will need to social distance and wear masks until they get outside. “We will be limiting the number of people in our rental area,” he says. “And our lodge will be limited to 50 percent capacity for those looking to get a snack or warm up inside.”

Ski Sundown has been collaborating with the Connecticut Ski Area Association (CTSAA) to put together a unified and comprehensive COVID-19 plan over the summer and fall months. This plan, guided by the recommendations of the state of Connecticut and the National Ski Area Association (NSAA), consists of a COVID-19 Responsibility Code and COVID-19 Operational Guidelines.

McCloskey says Mount Southington Ski Area officials worked with all ski areas in Connecticut to come up with general guidelines that “all could follow” this winter, based on state

guidelines for businesses. “We put a plan in place to show the state that we are all working together to make sure we do whatever we can to keep our guests safe. The state approved our plan.”

In an effort to allow for social distancing on and around the slopes, Mount Southington Ski Area is taking a number of steps, including allowing day



Ski Sundown has developed a unified and comprehensive COVID-19 plan.



Mount Southington allows skiers to buy tickets online ahead of time to ensure they’re not affected by capacity limits.

tickets to be purchased ahead of time, with capacity limits set on a daily basis. There will also be a 50 percent capacity limit inside the area’s lodges and rental areas.

Outside, there will be empty lanes at lifts to space people riding side by side, and skis and boards “naturally give you appropriate distance in front of you and behind while waiting in line,” says McCloskey. “We will ask our guests to only ride on the lifts with people they came in the same car with – and will allow those who wish to ride the lift alone to do so.”

In addition to the above steps, Mount Southington’s staff will be required to wear masks on property. At the start of each shift, employees will take a temperature reading and answer a questionnaire before they are able to clock in. Everyone will be required to wear safety masks inside the area’s restaurant and cafeteria, and will be following guidelines set forth by the state and the CDC. As for the lodge, Mount Southington will be following state restaurant guidelines. “Even if we [as a state] progress to a higher percentage allowed inside, we will be keeping to the 50 percent capacity for this season,” said McCloskey.

Laura Loffredo, director of sales and marketing for Powder Ridge Ski Area, as well as Brownstone Exploration & Discovery Park and Fire at The Ridge in Middlefield, says management and staff at those facilities “learned a lot this summer” after successfully opening them to the public.

Sean Hayes, president and chief executive officer of Powder Ridge Mountain Park & Resort, said of the resort’s summer opening, “We operated at a limited capacity level with strict policies and extensive staff training. We have taken what we learned and coupled it with our industry organizations, the CTSAA’s COVID response and the NSAA’s “Ski Well, Be Well – Ski Area Operations Best Practices” to form comprehensive policies and procedures.”

Face coverings will be required at Powder Ridge Ski Area at all times when indoors, and when physical distancing is not possible to maintain a safe distance. Lift, lodge, rental shop, and lesson capacities have been reduced to allow for physical distancing. The resort has relocated its retail store to add more socially distanced seating space in the base lodge; added heated outdoor seating, including a windscreen on its Ridgeside Tavern deck; opened its internet cafe in the restaurant to provide more seating for mid-week morning and early afternoon guests with free WiFi and charging stations; expanded its rental shop to allow for greater social distancing and improved flow; and added a heated seasonal tent for additional seating and event space.

Jacobs says Ski Sundown will be following the state of Connecticut capacity restrictions, which at press time allowed the areas to operate at 50 percent. “To better regulate our capacity, we have moved to an advance online ticket sales system, which allows us to cap the amount of tickets we sell each day. We strongly urge our customers to purchase their tickets online in order to avoid being turned away if we have reached our daily maximum capacity.”

Ski Sundown is also reducing building capacities to 50 percent, which will allow for social distancing and better flow throughout the buildings. These capacity limits will be monitored and maintained by “lodge hosts.” Lift lines will be socially distanced as well; both between the rows and groups of passengers. “We are asking that if you arrived together, ride together,” says Jacobs. “Otherwise, passengers will ride as two singles on opposite sides of a triple-person lift – or individually, if they feel more comfortable.”

Pre-packaged food will be offered



FUN FAMILY TIME: This year, Winding Trails will limit the number of people in its rental area and lodge to keep everyone safe, but there's plenty of space for fresh air and enjoyment outdoors.

in its food courts this winter, and more outdoor eating options will be available at its barbecue area. “Our bar, The Last Chair, will be open as well, according to state of Connecticut guidelines at the time of opening,” adds Jacobs. “We would like to encourage our customers to limit their time inside the lodge to quick food, changing, and bathroom breaks.” He hopes people will “cooperate and be kind, in regard to sharing this limited indoor space.”

Shockley explains that Mohawk Mountain Ski Area made improvements and renovations to its lodge to accommodate socially distanced seating, and opened up numerous walls to help increase air circulation. Restrooms have been reconfigured to allow for one-way traffic entrances and exits. “We have developed an app that will allow our customers to purchase their food and beverages without entering the lodge. Our app will alert the customer when their meal is ready so that they can pick up their order at an outdoor window with minimal exposure.”

Jacobs says ski areas have been preparing since the beginning of the summer to get ready for opening during

the pandemic. “We think we can have an awesome season, as long as everyone understands that things will be different this winter, and that we all need to cooperate and have more patience and understanding during these unusual times.”

Of course, Mother Nature must cooperate for ski areas to open, but Shockley is hoping to open Mohawk Mountain the day after Thanksgiving, with other ski areas targeting the same day or a bit later. Winding Trails will need a good dumping of snow before people can hit the meadows and woods. Shockley adds whimsically but in all sincerity, “C’mon Mother Nature, we need your help this year more than ever.”

Now there’s an understatement.

John Torsiello, an independent writer/ editor living in Torrington and part-time in Mount Pleasant, S.C., writes on a variety of topics. While he does not downhill ski, fearing an injury that would derail his modest amateur tennis career, he often enjoys gliding through woods and meadows on a pair of cross-country skis.

ADVENTURE

Flying High

Connecticut's newest aviators are earning their wings

By JOEL SAMBERG



UP AND AWAY: Instructor Mark Poole considers Connecticut one of aviation's most fulfilling flight paths. Photo courtesy of Mark Poole.



all it a tale of five student pilots. Not a cautionary tale, but a spirited one.

First, there's Justin Shafner. Shafner,

who grew up in Madison, is studying aerospace engineering at the University of Maryland, so on one hand it's not unusual to hear that he took flight training at the New Haven Aviation Center and received his pilot certification in September. On the other, he had two intriguing motivations beyond simply getting from one place to another. The first was to observe the world from an exclusive perspective, the second to enjoy the sensation of manipulating natural forces.

"I would much rather spend my free time exploring new places and watching the sun set from above the earth," says the new pilot. "And it's an incredible feeling to make decisions that impact how your airplane moves through the sky."

Then there's Glenn Buonanducci. When Glenn was in third grade, he saw Tom Cruise sail through the atmosphere in "Top Gun." A few years later, he took his first airplane flight and was absorbed with how the silver ship rose above the clouds with deceptive ease. When he was 13, he joined the Civil Air Patrol and flew in a KC-10 tanker aircraft that refueled F-16 fighter jets in flight. He was hooked. It's no wonder that the 42-year-old law enforcement officer from East Windsor is one of Connecticut's most active civilian aviators.

"When I turned 30, my wife gave me a gift certificate for a flight lesson," Buonanducci recalls. "For one reason or another, it stayed in a drawer. When I turned 40, she asked me what I wanted for my birthday. Something compelled me to ask where I had hidden that certificate." A few months later, he enrolled as a student pilot at the Premier Flight Center in Hartford.

Next is a 17-year-old high school student from Portland named Bryce Wiekrykas. For Wiekrykas, aviation has been a passion throughout his entire childhood, traced to the age of seven,



THANKFUL: For Glenn Buonanducci, flying is a gift that began with a birthday present. Photo courtesy of Glenn Buonanducci

when he received Microsoft's Flight Simulator X as a Christmas gift and could hardly tear himself away from the console. The following year, when he was eight, he took it upon himself to dress up as an airline pilot for a family vacation flight to South Dakota. The crew, captivated and amused, took him to meet the pilot and quizzed him on the Airbus A319 (which they assumed he'd

know all about).

"They were impressed," Wiekrykas recalls proudly. "My passion led me to begin flight training at the Meriden Aviation Center. I plan to apply to military academies, as well as to private aviation companies, and hope to become a military or commercial pilot."

Up next, 37-year-old West Hartford resident Eric Buhrendorf, who says he grew up listening to stories about his grandfather, a Navy pilot who, after World War II, flew his own Cessna all over New England to run his construction company. Buhrendorf's father had also wanted to fly, though economic conditions prevented that from happening. But Buhrendorf, who founded a successful IT support company, was able to take lessons at the former American Flight Academy in Hartford and earn his certificate. "I haven't looked back since," he says. "I consider flying an awe-inspiring privilege."

Finally, there's dermatologic and Mohs surgeon Jim Whalen, who lives in

Avon, works at the Cromwell practice he co-founded, and trains to be a pilot at Simsbury Airport. For him, it's all about pragmatism. With vacation property in Delaware, the doctor realizes that being able to fly there in his own plane would have significant benefits over other methods of transportation.

"I like the practical nature of being able to go places," he says, acknowledging that for him, flying is more a serious endeavor than an exuberant pastime. "As a pilot, you have to be entirely focused on all the things to do both in and out of the cockpit."


Still, Dr. Whalen, who took his first private plane flight at Hartford-Brainard Airport in 2019, always thought flying would be an interesting hobby, and looks forward to achieving his pilot's certificate.

It can be expensive, which may be one reason why, compared to the total population, there are relatively few certified pilots in the country (not much more than half a million). All told, it

can cost between \$6,500 and \$12,000, depending on the school, the type of certificate sought, and the length of time spent training. And it can take between several months and several years to achieve certification, depending on a student's schedule and financial resources.

"Students who plan two or three lessons per week can complete their training in a few months," says Phillip Smith, owner of Learn 2 Fly CT of North Windham and Hartford. "Students who schedule one lesson per week, or every other week, can expect to complete their training in a year or more."

All certified pilots have to abide by regulations and requirements set forth by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which are consistent throughout the country. But according to some flight instructors in the state, Connecticut happens to be one of the most worthwhile places to get involved in aviation.



LIVING THE DREAM: Phillip Smith tells anyone who wants to fly that it's an entirely achievable pursuit. Photo courtesy of Phillip Smith

"The basics are the same no matter where you learn, but we are in an especially good area with different kinds of topography and elevations, proximity to major waterways, islands off the coast, and busy airspace not far from JFK, LaGuardia, and Newark Liberty," says Mark Poole of Meriden Aviation Center, which has a sister location in East Haven (New Haven Aviation Center). "Connecticut is a great place to learn, to take off from, and to return to."

John Lampson, a trainer at Professional Instrument Courses (PIC) in Old Saybrook and a flight instructor at the Premier Flight Center in Hartford, is quick to add that weather often has the final say when it comes to training.

"All areas of the country have changeable and sometimes treacherous weather," he says. "But we have Mark Twain's old saying to contend with: If you don't like the weather in New England, wait a minute! Temperature extremes can affect

flight performance, as can icing and turbulence. There are many cancelled training days in Connecticut due to weather. But there's a big benefit, too," he notes. "Our students become more sensitive and conscious of weather and its impact on flying, and the value of that cannot be underestimated."

Pilot certificates fall into three categories: sport, recreational, and private. (The phrase 'pilot's license' is commonly used, but what pilots receive after training and testing is a certificate, not an actual license.)

The private pilot certificate seems to be the most sought after, though the sport pilot certificate is extremely attractive because it is the least expensive to obtain, though limited to light-sport aircraft (LSA) and a single passenger. Private pilot trainees must also receive a medical certificate from the FAA.

There are several additional rules and regulations – some age-related, others that concern nighttime versus daytime flying – all of which are explained during training. Student pilots must complete a multiple-choice exam on the FAA's website, which requires a separate charge (currently \$150) and has to be taken at an FAA-authorized testing center. One of the final steps is a test commonly known as a checkride, which consists of both an oral exam and a test flight. This, too has a separate fee (generally about \$400) which varies from school to school.

Pilot certificates do not expire, though pilots must maintain what's called flight currency if they intend to fly with passengers. Here, too, different rules apply for different situations.

Sound a bit complex? It certainly can be. But on the other hand, those who have the compulsion to learn to fly never let complexity get in the way. And that includes the tech-

nical elements involved. Anyone who has ever seen a cockpit or a movie about pilots and air traffic controllers knows there are many mechanical factors with which pilots must be familiar.

"I am not an expert in math and science," says Phillip Smith. "At Learn 2 Fly, we can go deep into the intricacies of aeronautics, but most students don't require that much detail, particularly since we have some easily-understood formulas that enable anyone to learn to fly safely and with complete confidence."

Mark Poole of Meriden Aviation Center and John Lampson of PIC agree.

"Yes, there are a number of computations you need to make as a pilot," Poole says. "But if you have the passion, you'll figure it out. If you love to fly but don't cherish arithmetic, you'll learn that knowing how to do calculations can be a lifesaver."

"At our school," says Lampson, "we have some pretty cool charts and graphs that make the math and science much easier to understand than many people may think."

"Getting my certificate was one of the more challenging things I've done in my life," affirms Buonaducci. "It's not something you get 'half' into. Between the instruction and the physical flying, you must be completely focused."

Connecticut pilots are part of a rich history of aviation in the state. "Plan to License Airships and Men" was the headline in the Washington Herald in February 1911. It concerned the nation's first law governing pilots. In fact, that Connecticut statute, signed by Governor Simeon Baldwin, was also the world's first aviation law, and it quickly became the model for similar directives in other states. Twenty-six years later, Connecticut became the first state in the country



NEW HORIZONS: Dr. Jim Whalen has been training to become a pilot. His dream is to fly his own plane to destinations south, and back again, whenever travel opportunities present themselves. Photo by Pamela Whalen



BIRD'S EYE VIEW: Instructor Phillip Smith and his student pilot get a unique perspective on the Connecticut countryside. Photo courtesy of Phillip Smith

CONNECTICUT FLIGHT SCHOOLS:

Arrow Aviation, Danbury,
arrowaviationllc.com, 203-744-5010

ATP Flight School, Hartford,
atpflightschool.com, 904-595-7950

Coastal Air Inc., Groton,
flycoastalair.com, 860-445-7315

Danbury Flight Training, Danbury,
danburyflight.com, 203-565-6994

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860-278-7961

Future Flyers of Connecticut, Simsbury,
futureflyersct.com, 860-819-3717

Interstate Aviation, Plainville,
interstateaviation.com, (860) 747-5519,
203-266-2089

**Learn 2 Fly CT, North Windham
& Hartford**, learn2flyct.com,
860-849-2226

Meriden Aviation Center, Meriden,
meridenaviationcenter.com,
203-648-4870

New Haven Aviation Center, East
Haven, HVNAC.com, 203-815-9542

Northeast Helicopters Flight Services,
Ellington, northeasthelicopters.com,
866-634-3567

Premier Flight Center, Hartford,
premierflightct.com, 860-724-2245

Robinson Aviation, East Haven,
robinsonaviation.com, 203-467-9555

Three Wing Aviation Group, Stratford,
threewing.com, 203-375-5795

to institute a separate department to handle all aviation matters.

There are more than a dozen flight schools in Connecticut, which makes it easy for anyone who is interested to find a place to learn. Experts caution, however, that students should make an effort to decide which school is right for them.

"First impressions are key," says Wiekrykas. "For me, the first thing I looked for was a professional-looking website, because the image a flight school cultivates is indicative not only of how well they maintain their aircraft, but also how seriously they approach their training."


"Aircraft availability was at the top of my list," offers Buonanducci. "Students should also determine if the available equipment is in excellent condition. Not good condition – excellent condition."

It may also be worth checking out whether or not a school offers full or partial scholarships. Some do.

It's rare for new pilots to have their own airplanes. Depending on a craft's age, size and condition, prices can range between \$18,000 and \$275,000 – and that's before storage fees, fuel, and other expenses.

"Sure, I'd like to own my own one day, but the decision comes down to cost," admits Justin Shafner, who quickly adds a caveat: "In my opinion, however, the freedom associated with having your own airplane is enough to outweigh the cost differential between private and commercial air travel."

Dr. Whalen made some ownership-related moves even while still training. His flight school was leasing a 2002 plane from a person who decided to sell it. Dr. Whalen and two associates co-purchased the craft and loaned it to the school to keep it in the fleet! "Owning one of my very own one day is still part of my long-range planning," he says.

"It's true that it's an expensive hobby," says Buonanducci. He acknowledges that he will most likely seek out a flying club that has a pool of aircraft. "Still, it would be worth every penny, because the feeling of freedom is priceless." 

In his work as an author and journalist, Joel Samberg has written about many human endeavors and has profiled professionals in such fields as psychology, music, theater, higher education, and neuroscience.



LIVING THE DREAM: From a toy simulator to real-life training, Bryce Wiekrykas is on an upward path. Photo by Faith Lee



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ELEGANT EFFICIENCY: This home office, designed by Sharon McCormick, proves that work does not have to equal clutter. Photo by Caldwell Photography

There's No Place Like Home ... to Work

Tips and tricks on how to create a stylish and functional home office

By SARAH LEMIRE

While cubicles and watercooler gossip aren't a thing of the past just yet, 2020 definitely redefined what it means to "go to work." For many people, the new normal no longer involves heading to the office in bumper-to-bumper traffic and grabbing coffee from the drive-thru window.

Instead, it's a battle for internet bandwidth and extra space at the kitchen table.

Since the pandemic set in earlier this year, a significant number of employees have transitioned to working either part-time or full-time from home. And, according to one study, many of them have little to no interest in returning once the pandemic is over.

A survey conducted by Global Workplace Analytics,

a research and consulting firm, finds that nearly half of respondents would look for another job if their employer didn't allow them to continue working remotely at least some, if not all, of the time.

"Employers are struggling with some tough decisions about the future of remote work right now, and employees are eager for answers," says Kate Lister, president of Global Workplace Analytics. "In the face of so much ambiguity, both are feeling the need for a vision of how they will be working in the future."

Regardless of the outcome, one thing is certain; home offices are here to stay – and creating one that's functional, practical, and stylish is essential to optimizing workflow. It can also make the difference between working from home, and being home, feeling overwhelmed with work.

SPACE, THE FINAL FRONTIER

"I'm passionate about creating home offices that work for people who think it's going to be long term," says Sharon McCormick, an interior designer and owner of Sharon McCormick Design, based in Glastonbury. "What I'm doing now for some of my clients is looking for space that hasn't been utilized enough in their house."

According to McCormick, that space can be found in any number of places, including spare bedrooms, closets, and even under stairs. "That's a big, empty space," she says. "So, you can put a door on it and make an office out of it."

But not everyone has space to spare – including McCormick, who lives in an apartment and, due to COVID-19, transitioned from an office to working out of her home.

To make it work, she moved a desk into her living room and incorporated it into her living space. She also got creative, repurposing items she already owned for more storage. "You can use furniture to put your supplies in," she says. "You can convert a dresser for things that you don't need every day, like paper."

McCormick says that part of converting a portion of her home into a workspace was viewing things from a new perspective. "You have to figure out how you can do things differently in this space you have. If you're an outsider looking in, what's redundant? How you can streamline it? How you could get things online?"

Ideas include scanning receipts, then tossing them; using your TV as a computer monitor, and ridding kitchen cabinets of unused pans and dishes to clear space for items you use more often.

"It's really important to understand yourself and spend some time looking at what you do – how many times you have to get a file, what you touch, and that will tell you what you need on a daily basis."

Finally, to help avoid a tangled nest of cords cluttering up your space, McCormick recommends investing in an under-desk surge suppressor with multiple outlets and USB ports to bundle them together. Tucked up underneath a desk or dining room table, they're much less of a visual and physical nuisance.

"It's much neater and it doesn't look so office-y. One cord is all you need."



SWEET SPOT: Be sure to make your home office a space you enjoy working in and look forward to going to. Add things you love. Photo courtesy of **Jennifer Moreau**



APPOINTING YOUR CABINET: This office designed by Sharon McCormick shows that the storage solutions and finishes that work in a kitchen are also highly functional and beautiful in a home office. Photo courtesy of **Urso Photography**

DON'T JUST LIKE IT, LOVE IT

Whether your home office is a dedicated space or carved-out corner of the family room, it's essential that it's a space you enjoy working in, and look forward to going to, as opposed to feeling like you're spending 40 hours a week in a work dungeon.

"Now, more than ever, it's extremely important to love it," says Jennifer Moreau, an interior designer and owner of Moreau Designs in Granby.

"People are realizing, after spending some time at home, how the space makes them feel and that they need to take action. It really makes you realize that you are affected by your environment."

Moreau, who emphasizes wellness and healthful living in her designs, says that she incorporates colors that help her clients feel happy, and surrounds them with biophilic – or natural – elements. "I believe it makes you calmer and makes more of an environment for you," she says. "I try to make your home feel good."

Moreau put her philosophy into practice when she converted an extra bedroom into a work studio for her interior design firm.

Wanting a space that was both inspiring and functional, she started by ripping out the old carpeting. The hardwood she found beneath it was in rough shape, so she painted a design on it. Then, she enlisted her daughter, a graphic designer, to paint a mural on the wall.

Moreau added other functional elements to the room like a worktable, bookshelves, and good lighting.

"It's a multi-use space, but it's great to be able to work there and feel like, at any given time, if I go off on a tangent, I can do it. I can create. It was really important to me have something that was vibrant, light, and bright."

When putting together a home office, Moreau says that even if you're working on a budget, try and pick out one or two items that are "must haves," whether they be functional or meaningful.

"If you buy something cheap, or something to just make do, you're never going to really, truly love it and you'll probably end up replacing it. So, I would take the risk and I would say, 'This is the non-negotiable piece that I have to have for this space.'"

BACKGROUND CHECK

It wasn't that long ago that people congregated in boardrooms for discussions and meetings. But much like wearing makeup and dress clothes, in-person gatherings have been kicked to the curb in favor of Zoom and Teams calls.

In this brave, new, virtual world, background is king. And while many people are opting to superimpose themselves in front palatial estates and nature retreats, there's no substitute for actually having a virtual-worthy background of your very own.

Jonathan Gordon, lead designer and owner of Design by



the Jonathans, LLC, suggests doing some strategic decorating to help create an aesthetically pleasing backdrop, starting with plants.

“You have to stage a little vignette. A small table or bookshelf, maybe put a few books on it ... but add some greenery; the greenery makes it feel like an enjoyable background and like it’s an intentional space, even if it’s in a high-traffic area, like a dining room. People don’t see what you see. They’re looking at your face and they’re looking behind you.”

He suggests concentrating on that viewable space by

mindfully putting furniture, books, art and other visually pleasing items within the line of sight.

“It doesn’t have to be completely balanced,” he says. “You can put pieces in one area and a couple of pieces in another area, but you don’t want to see wires and you don’t want to see general mess. You want to keep it curated.”

He also says that a home office should reflect your personal taste.

“Do you want it light and bright? Do you want it a little bit darker or more moody? You can express parts of your own character, your own design, look, and feel, Gordon says. “Somebody may want glossy white furniture; somebody else may want dark oak paneling. It just depends on personal aesthetic.”

Beyond appearance, Gordon says it’s important to create a home office around the tools that you use every day, and what your primary needs are. “The bare bones is really designing it around your electronics,” he says.

Lighting is also critical – whether it’s overhead, recessed, or lamp lighting. Give consideration to your window treatments as well. “You don’t want to get glare on the screen.”

Of all the items in your office, the chair might just be the most crucial. “Comfort is key. A good chair is so important for a comfortable office. It’s a matter of health.” It might be expensive, but according to Gordon, a good chair is worth





LIKE MOTHER, LIKE DAUGHTER: Jennifer Moreau uses local artisanal goods in the rooms she creates for clients, as well as customized pieces that she designs herself. For Moreau's own home office, her daughter Madison created a mural that includes symbols that are special to her mom – a koi fish swimming downstream (which represents overcoming obstacles), mountains with the sun rising (representing abundance and Moreau's travels in Peru), and feathers (a nod to her father's love of eagles). Photo by **Todd Fairchild**

the investment to help preserve your back, posture and how you feel overall.

If you're on a budget, he recommends doing a second-hand or pre-owned office furniture search. With many companies closing down their physical offices, good deals can be had on everything from chairs and desks to tables and bookcases.

"You may find some really good things," he says, "but also understand that they have to fit in your house."

If you're unsure of how to design your office, spend some time looking at Pinterest, Houzz, Instagram, and other sites to find ideas and inspiration. Sometimes, however, it's best

to leave it up to the experts. "If it's a complex space or needs a complex solution," he says, "you probably need a designer."

A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING

Part of creating an ideal work-from-home space is mapping out a plan to help optimize storage and reduce clutter.

"People tend to overcomplicate the amount of materials they need to run a functional office," says Kristin Vander Wiede, owner of Livable Solutions, a professional organizing business located in Guilford.

“Most need the basics: a printer, stapler, paperclips, Post-it notes, pens, pencils, a notepad, and file folders. In sum, keep it simple. No desk decorations, paper weights, or trendy office organization products.”

To keep clutter under control, Vander Wiede recommends going digital with paperwork and calendars, and foregoing common paper traps.

“Avoid flat trays that tend to accumulate items all around your surface areas in an office,” she says.

“Categorize paper into action folders or file it away. If you need more room, maximize your vertical space with a functional bookshelf or closet area, with shelving to store paperwork and supplies off the surfaces.”

Some of the most common mistakes Vander Wiede sees clients making are trying to work in a central area of the home, setting up an office in a place they don’t enjoy working in, and using non-functional furniture.

“Many of my clients work with furniture pieces they have inherited or that were bought for a different purpose. With a renewed need to have functional spaces in our homes, it’s important to make sure your furniture is functional as well,” she says.

“Does your desk have drawers for supplies? Do you have enough room for your computer and space to write? Are your walls covered with furniture or loose bins holding items that can be consolidated into one tall bookshelf?”

Really focus on what you want your ideal workspace to look like, and don’t be afraid to invest in the right pieces you need to pull it together.”

Working from home with children can be especially difficult and presents its own, unique set of challenges.

“As a parent working from home with two kids 2 and 7 years old, there is no greater challenge than the constant interruptions and keeping them occupied. I think most parents are

having a difficult time staying focused long enough to be productive,” she says.

To help, Vander Wiede suggests keeping storage systems simple and purging old toys, clothes, and other items that can pile up and get in the way.

If possible, create a separate workspace for children, free from toys and distractions – or set up a mobile workspace by using portable containers and supplies that can be put away at the end of the day.

The final step in creating the ideal home office space is implementing good practices.

“It’s all about systems,” says Leslie Raycraft, owner of POSH Organizing in West Hartford.

“Having a system just saves you all the time of paper shuffling. You’re like, ‘I wrote it down somewhere’ or ‘I know I got an email,’ then you’re shuffling through paper or your emails looking for that one particular thing and you waste so much time.”

To combat time lost trying to locate information, Raycraft recommends creating action files for paperwork and emails so you know where to look for quick access.

“A filing system is huge because, like anything, if you don’t have a system for the paper, it’s just going to pile up.”

According to Raycraft there’s not one, single, right way to set it up. Instead, it should be tailored to meet the individual needs of the person.

“Some people need to have it front and center right on the desk, others are fine to hide it,” she says, adding that what matters isn’t necessarily where you put things, but rather that you’re able to easily find them when you need them.

Raycraft notes that with any workspace, it’s essential to set limits.

“If you’re working from home, act like you’re going to work. Get dressed, take a shower, work out before you start your day, do your routine, ‘go to work,’ but also take breaks,” she advises.

“We’ve brought our job into our home and it can be seamless. So, whenever your normal end-of-day time is, stop. People have to learn to set boundaries and have a hard stop.” ■

Sarah Lemire is a journalist, columnist and author whose new humor book, “I Could Have Been a Hand Model,” is coming out this spring. After a recent writing stint in New York City, she is now once again happily working out of her home office and hoarding leftover Halloween candy.



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Beans, Birds and Business Savvy

In the midst of a pandemic, a family with Connecticut ties continues its quest to make the world a better place

By CAROL LATTER

The Inman family has never been known for backing away from risk, especially in support of a good cause. And not just any cause – one designed to reboot the environment, economy, and wildlife habitat in nation after nation.

Over the last 25 years, Crist and Amie Inman have worn a variety of hats: consultants to national governments and private business investors ... designers and managers of hotel, resort, and lodge projects ... and operators of their own eco-businesses – all built around a singular concept that was the focus of Crist's mid-1990s doctoral dissertation at Cornell.

His research demonstrated that conservation efforts could be significantly broadened if the private sector could be persuaded to invest in eco-friendly development, complementing what governments and philanthropies were already doing to preserve and protect the environment. "Sustainable development" has become something of a buzzword since then, but Crist's conceptualization of "entrepreneurial conservation" was unusual at the time, he says.

Once put into practice, this concept would not only benefit the environment, as it turned out, but help to create a novel business ecosystem aiding everyone from local farmers and artisans to the hospitality industry.

It all began when Crist was invited to Costa Rica in 1995 to give a presentation on his big idea. "And before Amie and I came back home to Ithaca, New York, I had a verbal offer that if I wanted to spend a year or so down in Costa Rica, there was going to be a real concerted effort on the part of the new president to make tourism part of his sustainable development plan. I accepted the offer."

The couple joined Costa Rica's tourism industry as it



GREAT DAY FOR A STROLL: Crist, Amie, Seth, and Milo taking a walk in one of their favorite wooded areas near their home in Costa Rica. Photo by **Diana Terán Victory**

built from virtually nothing to become one of the country's most important economic drivers. They have also helped replicate these entrepreneurial conservation efforts in such far-flung locations as India and Croatia.

Now, after years of traveling the globe to put their game-changing ideas into jaw-dropping practice, Crist and Amie have teamed up with their oldest son Seth, 28, to launch a coffee business called Organikos. And, of course, it's not just any coffee – it's coffee with a mission, designed to help reinvigorate ecosystems in their adopted country of Costa Rica.

The Organikos coffee brand officially debuted on Thanksgiving weekend, 2019 as the centerpiece of a plan by Amie and Crist to feature locally sourced products in gift

shops that they conceptualized, created, and continue to run at two Marriott luxury resorts in Costa Rica.

Both the coffee and distinctive handmade wares at their "Authentica" branded shops proved hugely popular through March of this year, giving the Inmans the "proof of concept" they were looking for.

Now the Organikos brand has come to America.

THE CONNECTICUT CONNECTION

Seth – who was just four years old when his parents took him and his younger brother Milo to live in Costa Rica, and who has lived and worked in several countries since then – has been active in La Paz Group, his family's global hospitality business, since he was quite young.

He is currently based in New Haven while wrapping up his graduate degree at the Yale School of the Environment, having previously completed his Bachelor's degree in history at Cornell while working at the Lab of Ornithology.



GROWING GREEN: Coffee at Villa Triunfo is harvested between November and February. This estate, in Costa Rica's West Valley growing region, has pioneered sustainable growing methods under the shade of high-altitude forest canopy. Photo courtesy of Villa Triunfo



The original concept for Organikos stemmed from projects he became involved in while his parents were immersed in ecotourism development projects in countries around the world. Seth had been interested in – and had laid the groundwork for – sustainable coffee production in South America, and particularly Costa Rica, through his work there over a number of years. This included encouraging local growers to switch to shade-grown coffee on farms where the natural environment had been eroded by a more aggressive farming approach. The shade-grown model allows coffee plants and birds to happily co-exist.

After nearly a decade developing lodges in India, Amie, a self-professed “Air Force brat” who was born in Alaska, and Crist, who grew up in Greenwich, Connecticut, decided to return home to Costa Rica in 2019. Knowing that Seth still needed to finish his studies at Yale, they offered to help keep the wheels turning on his planned coffee venture by procuring the beans and arranging to have them roasted and packaged while they waited for him to return. After landing the contract with the Marriott properties, the couple offered to showcase

LOVE TAKES FLIGHT: Amie and Crist met in September 1983 in the TWA terminal of New York's JFK Airport, where they were both waiting to board a flight to Athens, Greece. They have been traveling together ever since. Photo by **Diana Terán Victory**.



BRINGING IT STATESIDE: Seth Inman's vision for Organikos, a company offering the highest quality shade-grown Costa Rican coffee, has come to fruition. Organikos coffee is now available in the United States. Photo by **Stan Godlewski**



LIQUID MEMORIES: Organikos showcases “taste of place” from several of Costa Rica’s outstanding individual coffee estates, and from several of its prize-winning regions. Photo by **Alejandro Moreno Bianchi**

Organikos coffee in their newly minted Authentica gift shops, where it practically flew off the shelves.

Over this past summer and fall, as COVID-19 outbreaks have ebbed and flowed in every American state and around the world, Seth has been working part time with Amie and Crist to get the U.S. division of Organikos off the ground. In between classes at Yale, he has pitched in on everything from helping to create the package labels and website (organikos.com) to strategizing about the best way to get the word out to potential customers.

So far, most marketing has been through word of mouth – to relatives, friends, colleagues and, most recently, former guests at some of the hospitality destinations they’ve designed or managed around the world.

Its four best-selling varieties are currently available in the U.S., and next year, the family hopes to add four or five more. Seth says he and his folks have been careful to set a fair price point, to ensure people receive a high-quality product at a reasonable price. “We want our customers to know that they are not paying ‘extra’ for the environmental aspect,” he says.

The response has been very promising so far, with many repeat customers. “Things are going well,” says Amie. “People seem to love it.”

NOT YOUR AVERAGE COFFEE

So just what is it that makes Organikos so special?

It’s a good question, with a complex answer.

Seth says first off, all of the profits are earmarked for investment in bird habitat regeneration, which is explained on the Organikos website and illustrated through its social media. “This is what we mean by 100% Forward, the commitment we make on our labels,” he says. The first investment they have made is rehabilitating an organic coffee farm on land the family purchased in 1998. Coffee sales from the first year funded planting shade trees in 2020, with coffee seedlings to follow in 2021.

Second, Organikos is made from the highest quality beans, roasted to preserve their smooth, distinctive flavors. The raw or “green” beans, grown by Costa Rican farmers and transported to the U.S. by ship, are processed by a third-party, certified organic roaster in North Carolina. The beans are then placed in packages that contain virtually no plastic and are sent directly to customers, using shipping labels created by Seth and his parents in response to orders through their website. All of this helps keep the company’s environmental footprint small.

Third, for some buyers, Organikos may be a sentimental choice of coffee brands, bringing back fond memories of their visits to Costa Rica – especially now, when such exotic vacations are difficult or impossible. For tourists who enjoyed the Innans’ coffee while in Costa Rica and hoped to buy more once they got home, the virtual Organikos storefront allows them to do just that.

Fourth, as Organikos continues to grow, the family hopes the company will also help provide a much-needed boost to Costa Rica's economy and its people, who depend to a huge degree on both coffee sales and international tourism to make a living. In recent years, several million tourists have visited from around the world, patronizing the hospitality industry, touring the lush and scenic countryside, and taking tours of local coffee farms. While there, many people sample the coffee and take some home, either for themselves or as gifts for friends and family, along with local handicrafts and other goods. In 2019, tourists purchased roughly 1 million bags of coffee on their way out of the country – an important source of funds for both the local growers and the proprietors of shops where the coffee is sold.

Not only that, but when people give it as a gift, “that has a really important impact on exposing others to the fact that Costa Rica produces good coffee. Tourists will also share the story from their vacation. And so coffee becomes a taste-of-place ambassador for Costa Rica as a place to visit,” Crist says.

growers afloat while also benefiting environmental tourism and conservation – all causes dear to the Inmans' hearts.

FULL STEAM AHEAD

Some people might think twice before launching an international business venture in the midst of a global pandemic. For Crist and Amie, it was something of a no-brainer. In fact, not only has the devastating impact of COVID-19 over past nine months failed to stop these entrepreneurs in their tracks – it has actually accelerated their timeline.

The original plan was to begin selling Organikos coffee online in 2021, after plenty of exposure from its sales in Costa Rica. But then the unexpected happened.

“Our two new shops were fully open after renovations last November,” Crist recalls. “And by the end of February 2020, they were doing very well. We were able to say to ourselves, ‘We were right to do what we did – basically leaving everything we’ve done before in the hotel development and management field behind for now, and focusing everything



THE GENUINE ARTICLES: The Authentica shops at Marriott Hacienda Belen and at Marriott Los Suenos offer locally made artisan handicrafts, including Ceiba Design Collective's kitchen utensils made from recycled fine woods, and Wagat Upcycling Lab's fancifully conceived re-use of plastic waste. Photos by **Alejandro Moreno Bianchi**

The arrival of the global pandemic in early March 2020, and the closure of Costa Rica's airport soon after, brought international tourism – and the accompanying coffee sales – to a screeching halt. Crist says coffee revenues “went to zero” after the borders closed. Next year, visitor numbers are expected to be much lower than 2019's totals, and coffee sales will track that visitation. Making Organikos available online to American buyers will help to keep the coffee

on this new concept called Authentica, which we decided upon because we knew that other hotels in Costa Rica would want to do the same thing that these two Marriotts did. There's a lot of talk about wanting to return to authenticity.”

On February 29, the family celebrated Amie's “leap year” birthday. “That was the last day of the old world,” says Crist. “Starting in March, everything changed. It would be very easy to tell a sad story about starting up a new business and

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WOODEN YOU LIKE IT: Ceiba Design Collective's spice bowls and utensils (their coffee scoop, seen with Organikos coffee in the photo above, is a best seller) are treated with organic beeswax to provide a food-safe finish that allows the materials to breathe and age naturally. Photo by **Alejandro Moreno Bianchi**

then getting shut down by the pandemic, but I honestly don't feel that way."

For the next few months, he says, "we were basically forced to just slow down to practically a standstill and reflect. We could have said, 'Well, I guess we need to back out of this [retail operation] now because tourism is not only shut down for most of this year, but it's going to continue at a slow pace next year.' Instead, we decided to re-up our

commitment to what we were doing."

By July, Amie recalls, "we realized that one of the missed opportunities this year is not just our reduced sales, but the fact that Costa Rica won't sell anywhere near a million bags of coffee this year. And so we thought, 'What can we do? Not just for our own business, but for all those coffee farmers we have contracts with?' And we thought, 'Let's just experiment. Let's see if we can offer our coffee over the internet and make even a small dent in the lost sales for this year.' That was the impetus for this idea."

With travel restrictions making it difficult for Seth to travel back to Costa Rica, and realizing that he still had another semester to complete before graduation, "we asked him what he thought about spending some of his summer getting a head start on what might be the next most logical step for the coffee business."

Amie says she and Crist have always left the door open for Seth to change his mind about running Organikos after graduating from Yale – they would operate the business if he didn't want to. But Seth has been eager to move forward.

While his plans after his December graduation are not yet finalized, Seth says there may be an advantage for him to remain in Connecticut and oversee the U.S. operations. His brother Milo, meanwhile, is happily running an organic farm in Ithaca. "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree," Crist jokes.

No matter what happens, it's safe to say that for the Inman family, another unusual but inevitably successful venture is just around the corner. 🍏



The Price of Happiness

The problem starts in September. I receive an email informing me that Santa Claus will be visiting our local recreation center in December. For the “low, low cost” of just \$25 per child, my children can sit on Saint Nick’s lap and have a photo taken that we probably won’t ever look at again.

I send in my check. How could I not? It’s Santa Claus.

By mid-October, as my children are still debating about a dozen Halloween costume options, the brainstorming of Christmas lists begin. Somehow catalogs filled with LEGOs, Playmobiles, American Girl dolls, and more migrate into the home, filling tables and counterspace

with glossy images of idealized, joyous children playing with magnificent, pristine toys in strangely artificial landscapes.

I don’t get it. I thought that catalogs died alongside the TV Guide and the phone book? Where do my children find these things? How do they smuggle them into our home without me noticing? And why have these publications taken the place of children’s literature as their primary form of reading?

But as they begin circling items for their wish list, wanting a particular piece of molded plastic or an electronic doodad possessing more computing power than Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin had on Apollo 11, I am reminded of my own childhood. The gifts never

received. The Christmas mornings less enchanting than others. The disappointment of a Christmas present gone terribly awry.

My thirteenth birthday, for example, when the only gift under the tree for me was an envelope instructing me to go to the garage.

The garage?

Am I getting a car? I don’t have a driver’s license yet, but who the hell cares? I’m getting a car!

The car turned out to be a weight bench. I didn’t ask for a weight bench. I didn’t even lift weights. I didn’t want to lift weights. I had never expressed any interest in lifting weights. Perhaps this was my parents not-so-subtle hint that I should be lifting weights, but kids don’t want not-so-subtle hints for Christmas.

They want the items on their damn wish list.

My kids will not suffer the same fate. I may – no, I will – complain for the next 364 days that my children have too many toys, too many gizmos, too much clothing, too much molded, colored plastic, but on Christmas Day, all of those concerns disappear.

Pile on the presents, I say. Despite my wife's desperate protestations, I buy it all.

And it's true. I'll complain about every single one of them for the next year. I'll rail against the wanton materialism and mess that they create. I'll blame my wife and children for their excesses. But on Christmas Day, I am downright gluttonous in my gift-giving.

It only costs me about one million dollars.

Then there is the Christmas tree, which somehow now costs as much as a year's subscription to Netflix. And though we don't need a Christmas wreath and never wanted a Christmas wreath, look! The Christmas tree folks are selling wreaths. Let's get an even dozen. Also, a bottle of that stuff to keep the tree alive (even though it's very much dead) and a new Christmas tree stand, since last year's is still perfectly fine but not-so-new.

Add in some post-Christmas tree purchasing of hot chocolate for the whole family (at Starbucks, of course), and this little excursion only cost me half my paycheck.

Later in the week, I come home to find that the exterior of my house is now decorated with twinkling lights, courtesy of my Jewish wife who adores Christmas because she's only about 15 years old in Christmas years. So now we are an outdoor Christmas light family, which

**"I'll blame
my wife and
children for their
excesses. But on
Christmas Day,
I am downright
gluttonous in my
gift-giving."**

means we are now an outdoor Christmas light in constant need of replacement family.

My wife handles these purchases, so I don't know the actual dollar total.

Probably several thousand dollars.

Then there is the food. Four people are coming over on Christmas Day, which means we need enough turkey, ham, wine, and cookies to feed 40. We could probably feed a small village with the food we purchase, but that is irrelevant. It's Christmas. We must have an abundance of food, damn it. Everyone needs to eat enough food to make them sick, and there needs to be plenty of leftovers to make people sick for days to come.

Our grocery bill more than triples.

In the end, Christmas costs me a fortune. I'd tell you that it exceeded our budget, but that would imply that I had a budget to begin with. Only a fool would dare to create a budget for something as expansive as Christmas. Spending during the holiday season is like that 1950s movie "The Blob." It just grows and grows, reaching its appendages out farther and farther every year, sucking in more of my banking account with every turn.

That's okay. The smiles of my children on Christmas morning? Priceless. 📺

Matthew Dicks is an elementary school teacher, bestselling novelist, and 50-time Moth Story SLAM champion. His Christmas Day meal budget may be a little smaller this year, depending on the latest COVID advisory. Or not. He likes leftovers.

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



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