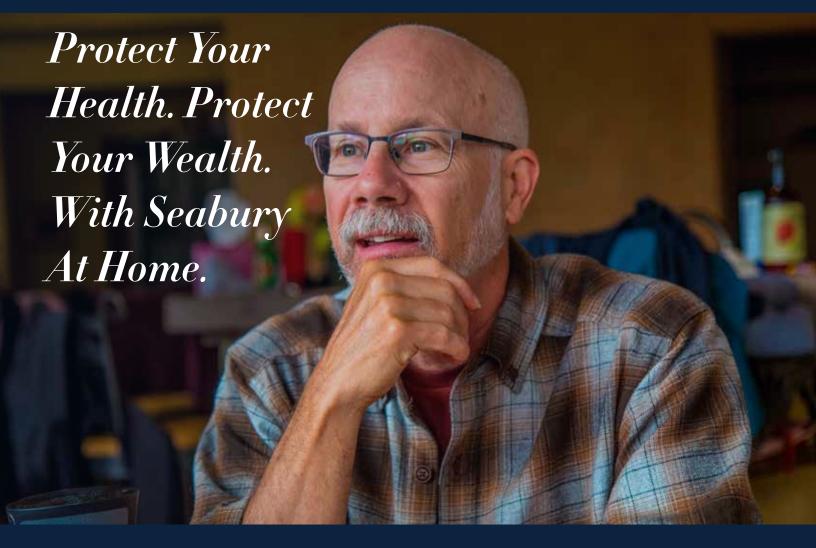




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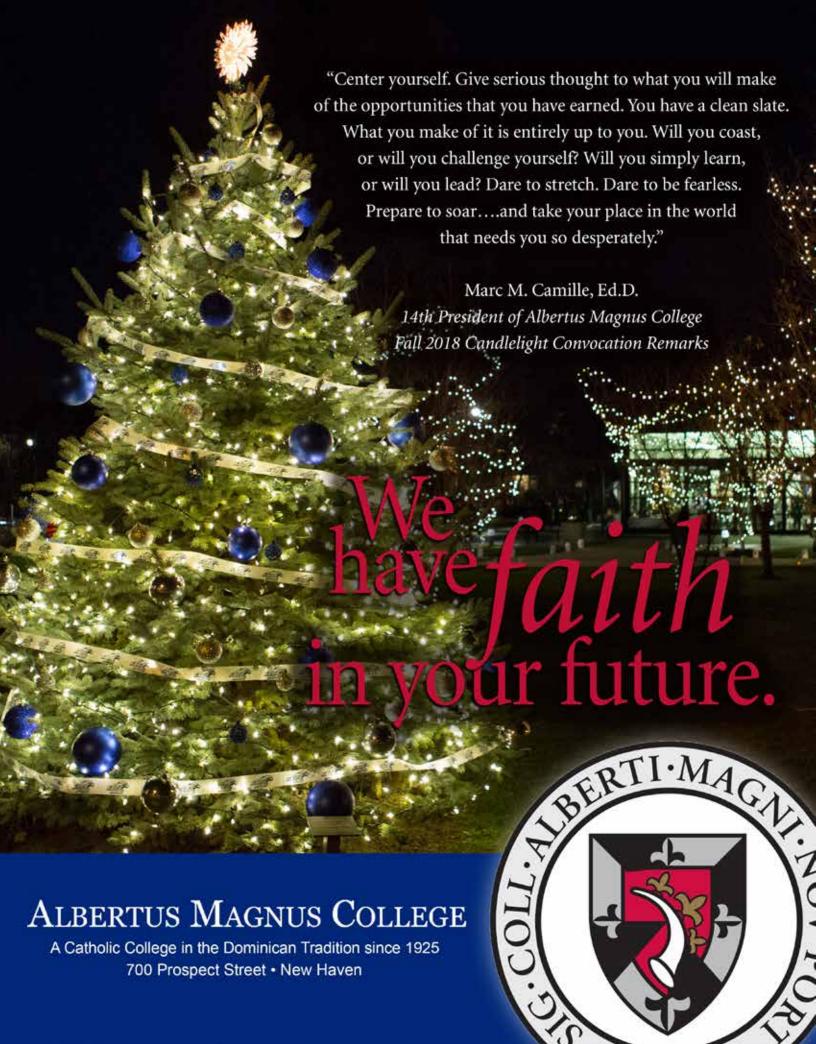
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EDITOR'S NOTE



Welcome to the winter issue of Seasons of New Haven!

This is always a busy, exciting time of year – when the temperature starts to dip, that's when things begin to heat up in the Elm City. There is so much to do, see and talk about during the late fall, winter and holiday seasons.

In this issue, we catch up with a familiar face, longtime former Mayor John DeStefano, Jr. He still lives and works in New Haven, and many people likely are wondering what he's

passionate about these days (hint: ask him about his new granddaughter) and what his future plans are.

We also hear from Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History Director David Skelly about his local favorites, and show you the interesting – and delicious – things happening at Three Girls Vegan Creamery based in Guilford.

We continue to shine a light on local businesses and nonprofits that contribute to the fabric of New Haven and make our region a better place, and in this issue, we take you behind the scenes at some of Some of Connecticut's film studios. We also bring you the latest winter fashion from the newest blockbuster retailer to come to downtown New Haven: L.L. Bean.

As always, I invite you to let us know what you think and join the conversation on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Happy reading,

Cara Rosner, Editor



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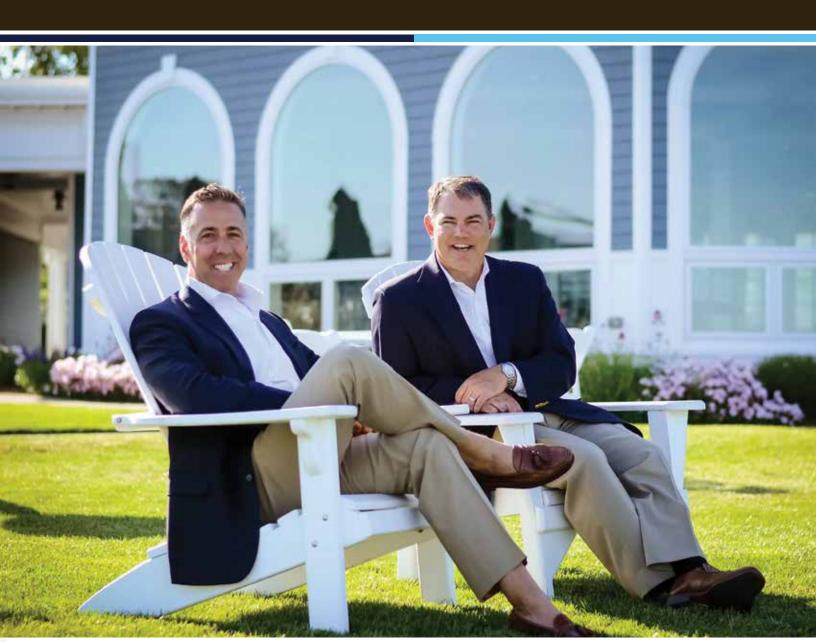
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WINTER 2018

8 OUT & ABOUT

With so much going on in Greater New Haven this winter, it's hard to choose what to see and do.



10 IN THE SPIRIT

Read to Grow, a Branford nonprofit, was founded nearly 20 years ago and continues to expand its reach and impact – helping to create a community of young readers.

16 FEATURE

A new book showcases aerial photography to bring readers a unique, bird's eye view of the historic Connecticut River.



24 DELICIOUS

It may be a bit off the beaten path, but innovation and amazing flavors abound at Three Girls Vegan Creamery in Guilford. Also, we round up the best places to order tapas in Greater New Haven.



33 FASHION

Get a sneak peek at the latest in winter fashions at L.L.Bean.

40 BUSINESS

Bulldog Tutors puts a unique spin on a long-standing business model. With a growing clientele, it's poised for further expansion - in Connecticut, and beyond.



46 FEATURE

Area film and production companies bring some Hollywood glamour to the Nutmeg State.



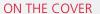
61 BREAKFAST WITH

David Skelly's love for the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History started when he was very young. Now the museum director lets us in on some of his favorites, in the Peabody and throughout New Haven.



64 HEALTH & WELLNESS

With coworking space, a café, live musical performances and curated art exhibits on its long list of amenities, mActivity is a fitness center unlike any other.



mActivity owners, Burch Valldejuli and Pablo Perez, reinvent what a wellness center can be.



He may not be quite as visible in the public eye lately, but former Mayor John DeStefano, Jr. is still keeping busy, working and living in the city he loves: New Haven.



76 LITERARY LANDMARKS

79 FINAL THOUGHTS

Among the health-conscious youth of today, nothing instills quite same sense of awe, wonder and puzzlement as the old-school Thanksgiving staple: canned cranberry sauce.



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Paradise Blue Nov. 21-Dec. 16

Paradise Blue, a music-infused drama, comes to Long Wharf Theatre Nov. 21-Dec. 16. It tells the story of Blue, a trumpeter who considers selling his past-its-prime jazz club in Detroit's Blackbottom neighborhood - until a mysterious woman comes to town with her own plans. This interpretation is directed by Awoye Timpo. 222 Sargent Drive, New Haven; longwharf.org.

Deck the Halls Dec. 1-9

The Ronald McDonald House of Connecticut will present the 29th Annual Trees of Hope at the Maritime Center in New Haven Dec. 1-9. The event transforms the building's lobby and hallways with more than 140 adorned trees, festive baskets, gifts and table settings - all donated by community members to benefit the families and children of the Ronald McDonald house. The event will be open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and also features a holiday boutique. Musical performances and visits from Santa will take place on weekends. 555 Long Wharf Drive, New Haven; rmhc-ctma.org.

GREATER NEW HAVEN



Jazz at the Lyman Center

Enjoy a night of jazz, with some holiday classics sprinkled in, when "Peter White Christmas" comes to the John Lyman Center for the Performing Arts at Southern Connecticut State University at 8 p.m., Dec. 1. Guitarist Peter White will be joined by friends Rick Braun and Euge Groove. Tickets are \$35 for the general public, \$30 for Southern faculty and staff, and \$20 for Southern students with a valid ID. southernct.edu/lyman.

Sounds of the Season Dec. 15 and 16

One of the sweetest-sounding traditions of the season returns when the New Haven Symphony Orchestra presents its "Holiday Extravaganza" Dec. 15 and 16. Conductor Chelsea Tipton will lead the NHSO through classic and new holiday carols, featuring the Elm City Girls Choir and a sing-along with Santa. The Dec. 15 show will be at 2:30 p.m. at Hamden Middle School, 2623 Dixwell Ave. in Hamden. The Dec. 16 performance will be at 3 p.m. at Shelton High School, 120 Meadow St. in Shelton. newhavensymphony.org.

All that Glitters

If you haven't seen the glitzy, temporary exhibit that came to Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History this past spring, this may be the perfect time to head indoors to "California Gold: Modern Marvels from the Golden State." The collection showcases 23 pieces of California gold, including unusually large examples and smaller ones featuring extremely rate crystallographic forms. The specimens and artifacts are on loan from The Mineral Trust. 170 Whitney Ave., New Haven; peabody.yale.edu.



An Evolving Story

Read to Grow's mission and impact keep expanding

by AMY J. BARRY

hildren flourish in all aspects of their lives when language and literacy skills begin at birth with their first and most important teachers – their parents. It's a simple but important mission that Read to Grow has been making a reality since its inception almost 20 years ago.

The Branford-based nonprofit set out with a tall order: to provide a brand-new book to every child born in every hospital in Connecticut. Initially, the baby board book, "Welcome to the World!" by local author Nancy Elizabeth Wallace, was distributed in a literacy packet given to every family with a child born at Yale-New

Haven Hospital. Today, the flagship Books for Babies program is in an additional 13 hospitals throughout the state, reaching at least 61 percent of babies born in Connecticut every year.

And the nonprofit keeps growing. Through various programs that have been added to its roster, to date, Read to Grow has provided more than 1.8 million children's books to more than one million people since the year 2000. Remarkably, the continuum of services provided statewide – and the growing number of books distributed - are achieved with just two full-time and seven part-time staff, along with more than 100 dedicated volunteers.



A Read to Grow volunteer visits with the mother of a newborn at Yale New Haven Hospital and explains the important role reading plays in childhood development. Photo by Tricia Bohan Photography

The Books for Kids program – formed several years after Books for Babies started – provides books and literacy education to families, childcare providers, doctors and teachers, along with a variety of other organizations and groups. Over the last four years, Book Places and Partnerships were added to the mix as formal collaborations with other nonprofits to reach more low-income and at-risk families.

Just recently, in October, Read to Grow launched Early Steps to School Success in New Haven elementary schools in partnership with Save the Children, which has been implementing the innovative early learning program for at-risk children in rural communities nationwide for over a decade. New Haven is the only cityscape adaptation of the program.

A DREAM COMING TRUE

Roxanne J. Coady, Read to Grow's founder and board chair, isn't surprised the organization's original mission is coming true in so many ways. Instead, she's grateful.

"Our success is certainly what I'd hoped for," she says. "I think the notion was a simple story I've told a million times. When I learned there was an eightvear-old boy at the Fair Haven Clinic [in New Haven] who had never owned a book, it seemed like a big problem. And so, my goal was to make sure there wasn't another eight-year-old who didn't have a book."

Coady, who since 1989 has owned independent bookstore R.J. Julia Booksellers in Madison, adds: "I really think reading changes lives, which is why I opened a bookstore."

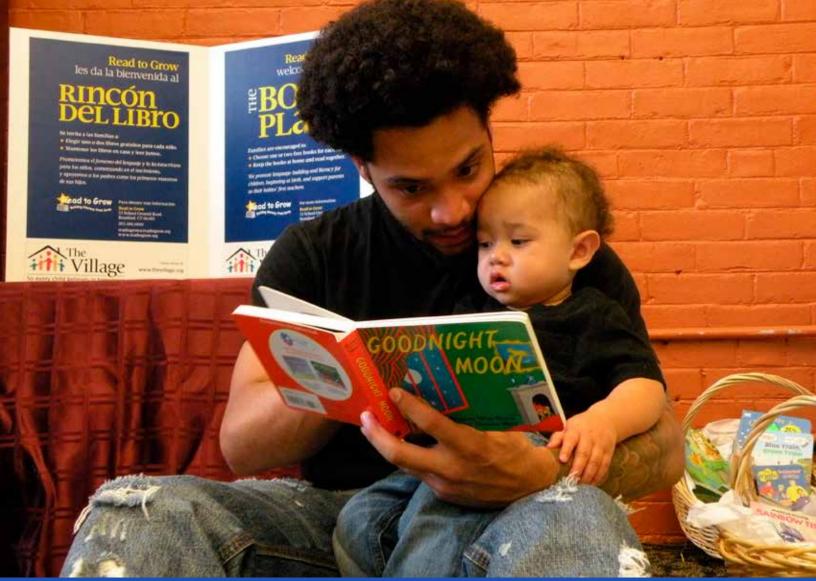
As Read to Grow expanded its reach, the complexities of the literacy problem became more apparent, she says.

"The research about zero to three [years old] being the most critical time for brain development was coalescing in the late 1990s and is now considered common currency," Coady says.

Explaining why Read to Grow is so big on giving books, Kyn Tolson, executive director, points to a 20-year worldwide study that was published in 2010. Its author, Mariah Evans from the University of Nevada in Reno, found that the number of books in a home is the top



Research shows the first three years of a child's life are the most critical when it comes to brain development, according to Read to Grow founder Roxanne Coady. Photo by Tricia Bohan **Photography**



A father and his infant son enjoy the classic children's book Goodnight Moon at the opening of Read to Grow's Book Place at the Village Annex in Hartford. Photo courtesy of Read to Grow.

factor predicting success for children. The more books children have in the home, the higher level of education they will attain.

"It's not the wealth or education level of a family that's a predictor, it's that books create home libraries," Tolson says. By having books in the home, she explains, parents create the expectation for their children that books and reading are important.

Read to Grow's work extends beyond just literacy, says Coady.

"There's a disconnect in our culture that what's going on over here isn't really impacting me," she says. "But these problems impact quality of life, what our cities look like, how our government spends its money – a lot of things, economically. But most importantly, it ought to reinforce our need to be compassionate and

thoughtful in the macro sense. There's 'us' and 'them' and it should be 'we.'"

Read to Grow, she adds, is implementing change in a cost-effective way.

"We have the slightest overhead and the most efficient, hard-working staff and volunteers. So, a large percentage of the dollars go to the families that are impacted," she notes.

ON THE GROUND

Marguerite Alpert is the Books for Babies coordinator and is expanding a new component of the program – The Prenatal Project, which aims to provide literacy information and baby books to women receiving prenatal care at community health centers and clinics.

"I have a teaching background, and we know as teachers, the more

times people hear a message, the more likely it is to stick," Alpert says. "The Prenatal Project speaks of our overarching goal, which is to help parents understand that they are their children's first and best teachers and that it's never too early to start reading."

Alpert points out that an infant's auditory senses are fully engaged by 20 weeks' gestation.

"It's always really fun to see the expression on people's faces when they realize they can read to their babies before they're even born," she says. "And that babies recognize your voice."

Linda Sylvester, co-coordinator of Books for Kids, remembers a time 12 years ago, when a Bridgeport mother called to request books for her twoand four-year-old children.

"The little boy loved the books so much, he started sleeping with them under the pillow," Sylvester recalls. "The kids are now in middle school and high school, and the mom still calls us periodically for books. She knows how important it is. Her kids remember Read to Grow and ask, 'Can we call that book lady?' It speaks to the relationships we've made."

Evelyn Tomasello, the bilingual co-coordinator of Books for Kids, addresses the state's increasing need for books and materials in both English and Spanish.

"Being from Puerto Rico, I can say to Spanishspeaking parents that in our culture, you don't talk much to little kids, [even though] they're listening, they're learning, their brains are developing," she says. "And the parents listen when I tell them that's not the way to do things. We're giving them tools, educating them, helping them. It's really powerful. That's what makes us unique. If parents are the first teachers, we have to educate them first."

Another Read to Grow partnership involves providing an educational component and children's books to the Connecticut Food Bank's GROW! [Grocery On Wheels] Truck, which travels to the locations of Head Start and other early childhood



Judith Jerald, left, senior advisor for Save the Children early childhood programs, and Read to Grow founder and board chair Roxanne Coady, gave a presentation at the New Haven Lawn Club about their new Early Steps to School Success partnership. Photo by Tony Bacewicz.



Read to Grow staff members from left, Marguerite Alpert, Robin Baker, Evelyn Tomasello, Linda Sylvester, Kyn Tolson, Paula Grimm, and Diane Visconti at the Early Steps to School Success presentation at The New Haven Lawn Club. Photo by Tony Bacewicz.

Read to Grow founder and board chair Roxanne Coady at R.J. Julia Booksellers, the independent bookstore she has owned in Madison for more than 25 years. Photo by Tricia Bohan Photography.

programs in Connecticut.

"It's fantastic," Tomasello says. "Families have to attend a half-hour literacy workshop before going on the truck to get food. We talk about why it's so important to read to your kids. It's a nurturing partnership, providing books and food."

Read to Grow leaders say the biggest challenge in educating new parents is teaching them how critical it is to delay the onset of screen time.

"The fact is, the American Academy of Pediatrics has said unequivocally that children from birth to 18 months should have zero screen time," Alpert says. "They recommend that even up to age five, children shouldn't have more than one hour of any type of screen time [daily]. There is strong evidence now that bright colors and flashing lights are disruptive to the development of the brain "

Tomasello adds, "I saw a mom with a two-year-old and the baby was holding a device. We explain why that's bad for the child, but we

"I really think reading changes lives."

also praise parents for not being on their phones when they come to our workshops."

AN EXCITING TIME

"Read to Grow started from something being a negative, terrible situation that Roxanne saw and imagined," Tolson says. "How can there be an eight-year-old that doesn't have a book in the U.S. in 2000? But Coady tackled the problem in a positive, passionate way and that trickles down to every single person connected with Read to Grow."

"I think our success has been making people feel that passion," Tolson continues. "You can tell them to care, what to think, but, 'Don't tell me, show me.' Our 'show' is passion and caring, the fire and energy about what we do that you can see in our staff."

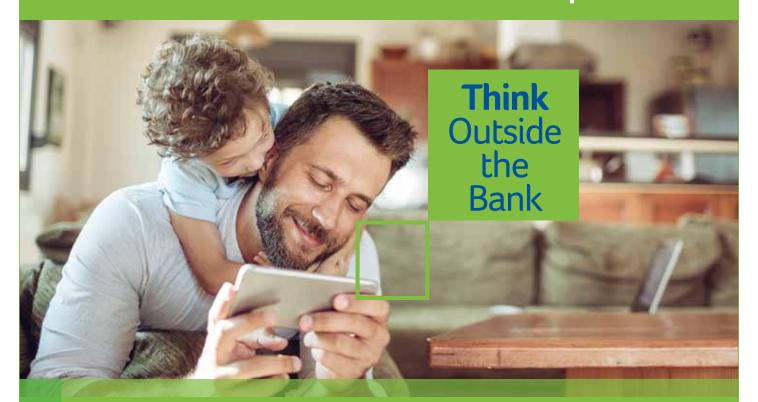
Robin Baker has been the nonprofit's office manager for the past 17 years.

"I've stayed so long because I see so much value in the mission," Baker says. "The energy behind it from the key people who were involved was pretty intense from the beginning. They had so much in their hearts, so much energy to keep it going. And the volunteers are amazing."

She adds, "I'm here when these families call and say, 'Can I get books?' The children seem to respond to the books with more joy than they do to any toy or gift. It never changes. It's fun to be a part of making this happen. It's meaningful; there is such a need. And it seems like such a simple way to help children."

For more information about Read to Grow, visit readtogrow.org.

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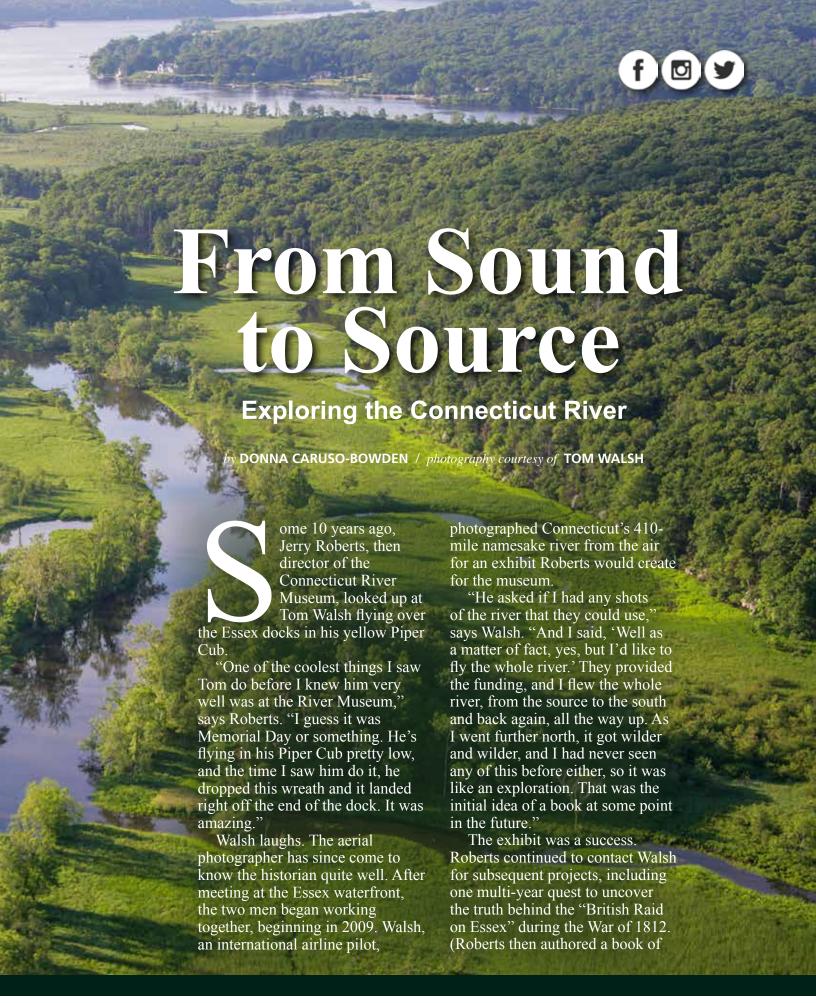
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NATURE'S PALETTE: Photographer/pilot Tom Walsh captured the artistic curves and colors seen along the river.

the same name.) All the while, the idea of creating a book together simmered. Two years ago, everything fell into place. They found a publisher and began the earnest work to make their vision a reality. In August, Globe Pequot Press released The Connecticut River from the Air: An Intimate Perspective of New England's Historic Waterway, penned by Roberts with stunning aerial images captured by Walsh. One working from the past, the other from the sky, the two men created a 256-page chronicle that flies high above and dives deep into the Connecticut River and the towns along its shores.

On the face of it, Roberts and Walsh seem like polar opposites. Roberts is a research-driven historian, author and accomplished museum executive, specializing in exhibit design. He served as vice-president at the Intrepid Sea Air Space Museum in New York City, and executive director at both the Connecticut River Museum and the New England Air Museum at Bradley International Airport. He is now a full-time writer and museum consultant.

Walsh explores and photographs intuitively from the air. He began flying at a young age and went on to become a fighter pilot in the United States Marine Corps before beginning his now 31-year career as a pilot for

an international airline. In 2004, he formed Shoreline Aerial Photography to capture bird's eye view images for corporations, government agencies, publications and individuals. (He photographed New Haven's Q bridge monthly for five years while it was under construction.) He continues his aerial photography when time allows.

When the men sit down together on Roberts' Deep River deck some 200 feet above a bend in the Connecticut River, it's easy to see their common ground. Walsh, 60, moved to Ivoryton from Atlanta in 1997, and married on the docks at the Connecticut River Museum. Roberts, 63, arrived for the Connecticut River Museum job in 2006 after 30 years in Manhattan, living on the Hudson River. Each with a keen interest in the Connecticut River, it was inevitable that they would meet.

Roberts writes that one of his fantasies when he lived in Manhattan was to live in a small New England village and walk down to the docks with a cup of coffee and shoot the breeze with local sailors and fisherman. "While I have, in fact, met plenty of New England Yankees and characters straight out of Central Casting, one of the most interesting locals I bumped into turned out to be an unexpected catch. Tom Walsh is not a sailor or a fisherman. He is a pilot,"

Roberts writes.

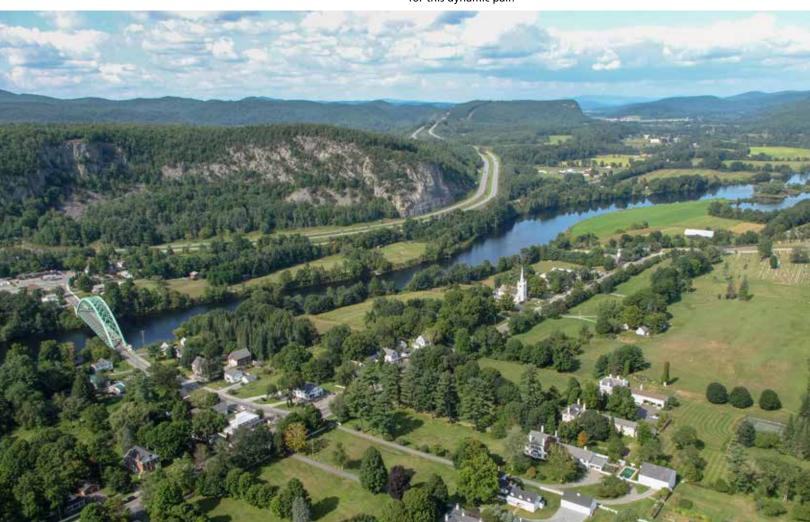
Their collaboration has coursed as naturally as the river itself. Walsh brought Roberts back into the sky after a decades-old decision to limit flying lessons due to the demands of the deep diving he was doing at the time. As for Walsh, his interest in history is constantly fed by Roberts. The two are already brainstorming future projects.

Perched on the deck above the tree line, chimes blowing in the breeze and an occasional plane humming over the river ("There's a Piper Cub," Walsh points out), their conversation soars, submerges, glides and ultimately lands on the banks of New England's longest river. They pore over pages that have just been sent to print, reminiscing about the shared work that resulted in a book that is beautiful to the eye and fascinating to read.

The introduction begins: "From a remote pond less than three hundred yards from the Canadian border, New England's great river begins its four hundred and ten mile journey to the sea." With some 300 aerial photographs



INTREPID DUO: An unplanned meeting led to aerial adventure for this dynamic pair.



PLACID PASSAGE: The Connecticut River, which begins near the Canadian border, flows peacefully through the New England states to Long Island Sound.



CAPITOL CROSSING: Walsh snagged a unique views of Hartford.

throughout, it begins at the river's mouth at Long Island Sound.

"Originally, even as I did this exhibit at the Connecticut River Museum, I was going to follow a theoretical drop of water," says Roberts. "In the end, we decided it's best to do exploration just like Tom flew it, just like [17th century Dutch explorer Adriaen Block explored the river. The first encounter that you have is the Long Island Sound and the jetties at the mouth of the river."

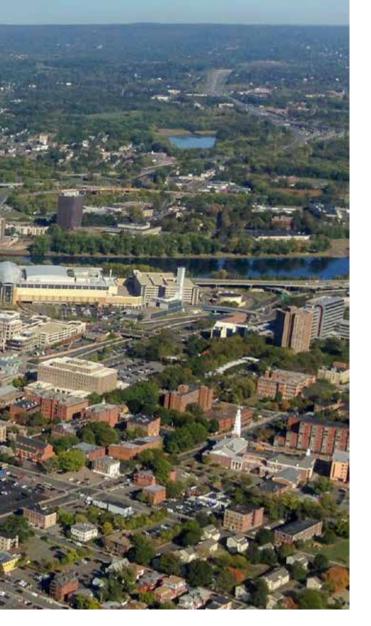
In Old Saybrook, the pages very quickly dive into the kind of surprises that surfaced during their work. As Walsh was flying, he noticed a shape just beneath the water at the entrance to North Cove. He zoomed in to photograph the timbers of a sunken hull sticking out from the remnants of an old railroad causeway. The story is told – replete with an additional photo of the living ship – of how the 300-foot steamboat Granite Spray burned upriver in 1883 and was towed to this resting spot. It still occasionally breaks the

surface at low tide.

"People pass this all the time; they probably don't even know this is there," says Roberts.

The stories climb ashore to the cities and towns in the four states where the Connecticut River runs its course. There are the well-known cities, such as Middletown, Hartford and Springfield, and there are towns and bridges (more than 80) with their own claim to fame: Sunderland, Mass., with the Cyclops corn maze that Walsh had not even realized he photographed; Brattleboro, Vermont, where the largest producer of pipe organs was once located and not far from where Rudyard Kipling wrote The Jungle Book; the Cornish-Windsor Bridge, the longest covered bridge in the country; and the Ledyard Bridge in New Hampshire, near where the Camp Fire Girls first organized. With the help of research by his wife, Roberts found another story of that bridge – the Ledyard Challenge.

"It's been going on since the 1800s," says Roberts.



GLIDING THROUGH: The book captures some magic moments. Here, a drawbridge lifts to allow a sailboat to pass by.

"Freshmen come down from the campus, down to the riverbank. This is Dartmouth right in the hills here, so they come down, they strip naked, hide their clothes in the bushes, swim across the river, come up on this side, then run back across the bridge naked and get their clothes before the police can arrest them. Happens every year. They don't announce when it is."

Roberts accompanied Walsh on shorter flights, including one over Bradley International Airport. He writes about Walsh's calm demeanor: "Here we were in our sparrow-like amphibian, orbiting above the runways as sleek jets came and went to destinations near and far. It was all pretty extraordinary to me, but just another day in the air for Tom."

Walsh's river-length flights were done alone. He'd find a place to stay overnight before making the return trip the following day. Some of his earliest images were taken from a Piper Cub, which he sold. He now owns a Cessna Cardinal and a SeaRey amphibian for his work, using gyrostabilizers with high-end cameras. Walsh shot thousands of photographs of the river, which he and Roberts had to whittle down for the book.

"We had to discard some phenomenal pictures," says Roberts, detailing a photo they almost cut until they realized that what they were looking at was three sunken barges that had grown into islands: "They were probably moored and abandoned there, laying there for decades. And literally, that picture was going to go on the cutting room floor until we noticed something odd about those islands. So that happened many times."

Both are fascinated with the river's many oxbows – switchbacks that create undulating patterns and leave behind crescent-shaped lakes. They make artistic images and also reveal the history of the river.

"I was always attracted to the oxbows," says Walsh. "I love

history, and what you are looking at is hundreds and hundreds of years of history in one glance. It was surprising to me how often the river changed course and is still changing course up there [in the north], and I don't think people realize that."

The final section of the book heads into The Great North Woods, where Walsh ventured to the source of the Connecticut River. The terrain becomes rugged and uninhabited, and a series of lakes emerges: the First, Second, Third and Fourth Connecticut lakes, labeled from south to north. It is the Fourth Connecticut Lake in New Hampshire, just below a ridge where a U.S. Customs station sits at the Canadian border, that is the source of the Connecticut River. Just 528 feet long, it features a floating bog with insect-eating plants.

Walsh was so intrigued that he rode his motorcycle to the Customs station and hiked the trail to the source of the river. There, he stepped across one end as easily as if it were a puddle.

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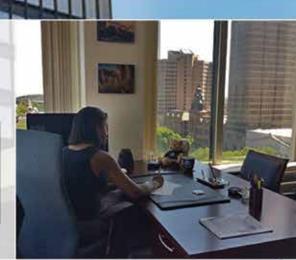




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Oscar Wilde

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Two girls smiling: Brittany Guerra with her mom, Tracy Alexander, the vegan Nonni.

t was noon on a clear blue Sunday, Louis Prima's "Buona Sera" was bouncing around the airwaves, and my pal Violet and I were eating sandwiches as big as our heads. Hers was hot sausage and parm on jumbo circles of pesto-slathered fried dough; mine was a Bellissimo, the same fried dough stuffed with a cutlet, fresh mozz, fire-roasted peppers and more pesto. A cheery throng crowded the counter while we ate, calling out orders for lasagna, meatball subs and cannoli, while nibbling free samples of pizzagaina, a.k.a. Italian Easter pie.

We felt like we were at the Feast of St. Andrew on Wooster Street. ("I'm going to win a goldfish any minute now," said Violet.) But no, we were in an off-the-beaten-path section of Guilford, at a mini shopping center next to a Krauszer's, and this was

Three Girls Vegan Creamery.

I couldn't believe my taste buds. Turns out, the "cutlet" I'd devoured was made from mushrooms, flax, chickpeas, spices and a touch of gluten; the sausage was also 100 percent plantbased. Easter pie, in its Little Italy version, is made with eggs, butter, ricotta, cream, prosciutto, sopressata, provolone and parmesan; TGV's take was loaded with six "meats" and four "cheeses," but none of them had ever been near an oink or a moo.

Violet, herself an experienced vegan and raw chef, was blown away: "I know good vegan food and I know good Nonni food," she said. "This is both. There's a magician in this kitchen ... they removed the sin and guilt and put in extra flavor."

Since it opened in the summer of 2017, TGV has garnered raves and a dedicated following across the country.

It consistently sells out of product not only at its storefront but at health food stores, farmer's markets and online. Even Oprah is a fan. At press time if all goes according to plan and an Indiegogo campaign pays off - TGV planned to move in November into a retail spot on Guilford's Boston Post Road that more than doubles its operating space to 1,200 square feet.

"I'm not a chef, I'm just an Italian grandma!" sings out the bright-eyed matriarch of the operation, Tracy Alexander, nee Vitale. Don't let her fool you: she's also a lifelong businesswoman and entrepreneur. And, yes, she's a passionate home cook, with no formal training, who has garnered a collection of more than 800 original and inherited recipes. TGV is a family business through and through – grown daughters Brittany Guerra and Taylor Costin are the other two "girls" in the



Craving a bacon cheeseburger with onion rings? This one's made with Portobello mushrooms and other plant-based ingredients.

name – and love of family is where the company's story begins.

Back in 2011, explains Alexander, her mother, Theresa Picone, was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer. Alexander and her sister, an advanced practice registered nurse specializing in diabetes care, got to work researching treatment options. "We decided to forgo chemo and radiation," she recalls. Instead, they chose to participate in a few targeted clinical trials, and to make a radical lifestyle change – go vegan.

"We saw how animal products were feeding tumors," she recalls. "I had to convince my mother – she was resistant to change – so I sold the idea to her with a PowerPoint presentation. That's how I operate." Mom went along with it, as did the rest of the extended family, "but we weren't going to live on salads for the rest of our lives." The family's first challenge: Make vegan mozzarella that tasted like mozzarella, looked like mozzarella, and melted like mozzarella.

"It took nine months for us to get the recipe right," Alexander admits, describing batch after batch tested and rejected by her human guinea pigs. The more successful experiments found their way to her brother-in-law's pizza place, New Haven Apizza & Bakery in Madison.

"He started offering vegan mozz pies by special request, and the customers went cuckoo," recalls Alexander. "I thought, 'Maybe this is something the people really do want." By then, the trio had developed recipes for ricotta and parmesan, which they produced in the pizza kitchen. Orders started rolling in.

In three short months, the women had outgrown the pizza place. So,



Vegan eggplant parmesan is tasty enough for Wooster Street enthusiasts.

with the blessing of Executive Director Sister Eileen Dooling, they set up operations in the kitchen of Mercy By the Sea, a spiritual retreat center in Madison. That, too, proved to be only a stop along the way; soon enough, they took a leap of faith and signed a lease on a former dry cleaning business that had been vacant for 12 years. What started as a strict "creamery" became more of an Italian deli, its cases filling not only with vegan cheeses, now prepared by daughter Guerra, but with Alexander's versions of salami, sausages, meatballs and more. Then came prepared entrées, including barbecued ribs, porchetta roast and lasagna. Creamy, dreamy vegan desserts followed - think chocolate-dipped doughnuts, layer cakes, and a divine pumpkin cheesecake topped with caramel and roasted pecans.

There is a verb I've only recently heard of: veganize. This describes the act of taking an existing dish and reproducing its flavor and texture – reverse engineering it, if you will – without using meat, eggs or milk products. At TGV, veganized cheeses combine traditional techniques with non-traditional ingredients; one best seller is a cashew-based cheese that is cultured and fermented for a week, then smothered in one of 15 savory toppings. ("This cheese is nuts," exclaimed one fan. "Tastes like cheese, only better," wrote another.)

As they say, these cheeses are nuts! TGV signature cashew cheeses are cultured, fermented, aged and encrusted with (left to right) vegan maple bacon/herb, black peppercorns, and cranberry/pumpkin seed/ fresh thyme/pistachio. Here they're paired with a fragrant hunk of house

"pepperoni."



am such a fan of tapas that I wish there were an app for that - an at-a-glance map on my phone showing the all the tapas places within a 10-mile radius, no matter where in the world I may be. Tap for Tapas? A Touch of Tapas? UTF (Universal Tapas Finder)? Until such a thing exists, here is a good old-fashioned printed list of Spanish-style tapas places in and near New Haven. Buen provecho!

Olea, New Haven

This High Street eatery, in the shadow of the Yale Center for British Art, is considered the granddaddy of local tapas. It is the place where, back in 1996, New Haveners were introduced to Pika Tapas, with an astonishing menu inspired by the culinary revolution taking place in Barcelona, Spain. Olea still wears the tapas/Spanish restaurant crown, with a kitchen guided by celebrated chef Manuel Romero. Care for a plate of scarlet shrimp with charred lemon, olive oil and aji amarillo aioli? How about grilled blood sausage with truffle oil potato puree, fresh garbanzo beans and broccoli chimichurri? You get the picture; this is original, exciting cuisine, in small portions that burst with intense flavors. An expertly managed dining room and a curvy bar complete the scene.

Kala Bistro, Hamden

This newish offspring of the Olea team has a lot going for it, not the least of which is a comfortable, contemporary atmosphere that invites lingering (tapas is meant to be an evening-length meal, after all). Several classic tapas - Spanish potato omelette, croquettes with prosciutto and béchamel, codfish mousse – appear alongside more Americanized plates like fried oysters and lamb sliders. Those who want to go deeper into the menu will be rewarded with an excellent weekday deal: Mondays through Thursdays, there's a \$29 prix fixe dinner with three courses and many mouth-watering choices, plus halfprice wines by the bottle.

Barcelona Wine Bar, New Haven

This Connecticut-born tapas and Spanish restaurant group has never stopped growing, and now boasts locations in Philadelphia, Nashville, Denver and beyond. Yet each restaurant retains an autonomous chef and, at least in New Haven, this arrangement results in cuisine that feels passionate. The menu evolves with the seasons and their ingredients: recent offerings have included wild striped bass ceviche with tomatillos and cilantro; foie gras torchon with nectarine coulis; and several dishes prepared "a la plancha," including pork belly, snap peas, swordfish and Caña de Cabra (goat cheese from Murcia) with truffle honey. There are also large plates, many made for sharing. A long, tall bar and lively lounge are always hopping, including at Sunday brunch.

Bistro Basque, Milford

A jewel box of a restaurant across from the Milford Green, this charming eatery represents the cuisines of both France and Spain - Basque country. Familiar tapas ingredients and techniques are very much on the menu, but so are lots of pleasant surprises. Sautéed shrimp in garlic sauce shares space with a dish of wild mushroom flan; there is a Spanish tortilla, and also cauliflower gratin wrapped in Serrano ham. The atmosphere at Bistro Basque is, in a word, romantic, and the neighborhood invites a post-feast stroll, making it a fine choice for date night.

The Village Bistro at Beach House, Milford

After 14 years on the Boston Post Road, the Village Bistro has moved to much larger quarters – the former Beach House on Merwin Avenue, across from a nest of mansions on the Sound – yet it continues its tradition of serving breakfast, lunch, dinner and brunch, and of hosting special events, including some with live music. This is tapas with a twist, where prosciutto-wrapped cranberry goat cheese shares space with empanadillas and falafel plates. At dinner, meat lovers can dig in to the Plato de Carne, featuring chicken, Italian sausage, chorizo, filet mignon, a half-rack of lamb, and sides.

Solun Tapas Bar, Woodbridge

Not far from the borders of Westville, Solun sits in a countrified shopping center and seems to radiate warmth. At happy hour, its inviting bar area, in shades of gold and red, draws locals for bargain tapas, sangrias and such. The full menu features cold tapas, including a lovely Spanish cheese plate, plus hot tapas, fried tapas, flatbreads, a selection of risottos/arroces and a list of vegetarian tapas. Dinner is rounded out by fresh pastas, meats, seafood, and paella. Several gluten-free options are clearly marked.

Ibiza Tapas Wine Bar, Hamden

With an energized menu and a spruced-up interior. courtesy of new owner (as of January 2018) – Jamie Lopez of Paella Restaurant and Tapas Bar in Norwalk – Ibiza Tapas remains a colorful presence and a nice respite from busy Dixwell Avenue. Fancy a dish of sautéed mussels, corn, chorizo and curry? It's on the regular menu, as well as on the bargain-priced happy hour menu. There are escargots, marinated fresh anchovies, sirloin kebabs, a pear and blue cheese salad, and no fewer than four varieties of paella, including a meat-free/fish-free option.

Bistro Mediterranean, East Haven

As it is at Ibiza, Bistro Mediterranean seems worlds away from its workaday location in East Haven. You might as well be on the Costa Brava. An expert staff delivers traditional tapas alongside somewhat Italianate cuisine, plus unexpected fare such as an exquisite little steak tartare. Bistro Mediterranean has a way with salads, which is a nice surprise for a tapas place, and its many loyal regulars know to order from the extensive specials sheet, and to ask Miguel to choose their wine. Check out the Westbrook and Norwalk locations, too.

* Note: For details on Pacifico, which offers tapas on College Street in New Haven, see the Autumn 2018 Seasons of New Haven.



How sweet it is! Vegan chocolate doughnuts are made without dairy, and thus a special treat for lactose-intolerant folks, too.

There is a steak made with black beans; pastrami made from beets and mushrooms ("With melted cheese on a sub, people go crazy," says Alexander); vegan smoked maple bacon; and, for the holidays, a turkey roast with apple-sausage-sage stuffing – a dish sure to bring everyone to the table.

Alexander and Guerra are delighted that so many nonvegans have found their food and become loyal customers. (For the record, sister Taylor Costin is currently focusing on her career as a celebrity Pilates instructor.)

"I consider what we do to be culinary activism," says Alexander. "I would never make anyone watch a documentary, but we're serious about using organic, non-GMO products." At TGV, even soy and tofu are banished due to negative health implications.

Theresa Picone left this earthly realm in January, at the age of 80. Against all odds, veganism had helped give her seven precious years of life, long enough to welcome her fifth and sixth great-grandchildren into the world. The youngest child, now four, asks before he eats anything, "Is it vegan?"

Moving forward, Three Girls Vegan plans to expand its wholesale, e-commerce and catering production in its new space. It will feature new "grab and go" options, and will be open for retail business several days a week. "But we're never going to be open every day," insists the woman who is, first and foremost, a New Age Nonni, a vegan grandma who fervently believes in the power of cruelty-free comfort food.

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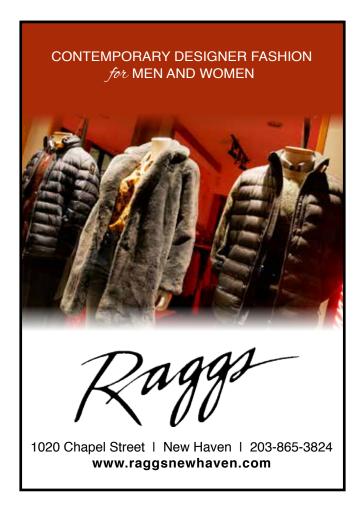


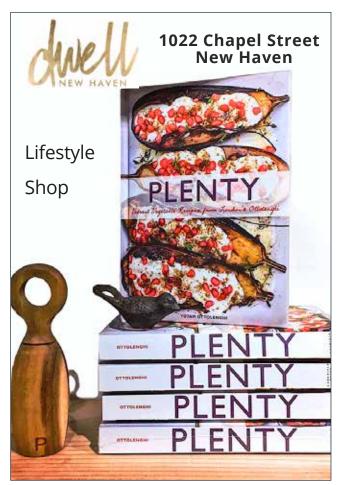
















Making the Grade

Jasmeet Jernaill, also know as "Jas" is chief sales officer at Bulldog Tutors.



Tutoring company boosts confidence along with test scores.

by CARA ROSNER / photography by TONY BACEWICZ

ike many graduate students, Michael Newcomer sought to supplement his income while he worked toward a PhD. But, unlike most, his decision to do so changed the trajectory of his career path and put him at the helm of a unique, socially conscious and growing company.

"Grad students aren't paid a tremendous amount, so I ended up doing some tutoring for a bunch of different companies," recalls Newcomer, who obtained a doctoral degree in biophysics from Yale University in 2010. "[The companies] always really struggled to hire tutors. Whenever I would apply, I would instantly get a call."

That got him thinking, and a couple years later in 2012, Newcomer started Bulldog Tutors. Like other similar companies, it offers help preparing for a long list of tests that can cause angst among students and their parents alike: the PSAT, SAT, ACT, LSAT, GMAT, MCAT and AP exams, among others.

But the company, which is headquartered in New Haven with offices there and Guilford, has a unique hook – all of its tutors are Ivy League graduates or students, and all have scored in the top 1 percent nationally on the tests they teach. They tutor across all academic subjects and for students of all ages.

Newcomer, who is founder and president, says he launched the company in New Haven because there are so many qualified tutors here, but his sights are set on expansion.

In the short term, Bulldog Tutors aims to open an office in Fairfield and possibly one in Hartford. Beyond that, Newcomer is eyeing additional cities outside of Connecticut in places like Philadelphia

and Charlotte, N.C.

"There could be lots of other places we could go," says Newcomer, who is 35. "We have a unique product."

In the company's early days, he was the sole tutor. Once he saw the demand, he knew the company was ripe for expansion. Today, the company employs three or four full-time tutors at any given time and between 20-30 part-time tutors, according to Newcomer, and provides services to about 500 students annually.

He leads the company with Chief Sales Officer Jas Jernaill, who has a degree in behavioral cognitive science from Yale and oversees the company's day-to-day operations and growth initiatives.

Clients have been drawn to the company's highly qualified tutors and growing track record, Newcomer says.

"We certainly improve people's test scores; there's a formula for doing that," he says, and the relatively young age of the tutors helps them connect with students. "One thing parents have really liked is this sort of mentorship that's come out of it."

A PERSONALIZED APPROACH

Lisa Koste has seen the impact that mentorship has had on her 16-year-old son, William. Koste and her family live in North Carolina but have been in Connecticut the past few summers for work obligations, and Lisa Koste discovered Bulldog Tutors in the summer of 2017, soon after William had taken the PSAT back home and "not scored where he felt he was happy," she recalls.

"I met with Jas [Jernaill] and told him a lot about William and his personality and so forth,

"Tutoring allows you to have a real impact on people's lives." That's really rewarding in a lot of ways."

- Michael Newcomer, Bulldog Tutors founder



Yale graduate Christina Bartzokis coaches a high school student on math as he prepares for upcoming college entrance exams.

and he got him," she says. "He understood him, and I loved that. He pegged him the way I would peg him."

A tutor worked with William to increase his PSAT score, three days a week for the eight weeks the family was in Connecticut. And the tutor continued to speak and work with William once he returned to North Carolina.

"She wound up being a mentor to him," Koste says. The tutor took a vested interest in William's success, even bringing in her own notes from law school classes so William could see how she took and organized notes. "He's looking up to her and he's saying, 'This is what success looks like; I need to model this.""

She credits Bulldog Tutors with boosting her son's confidence as well as his practice test results. Among the most valuable insights Jernaill shared with her, Koste recalls, is suggesting William might score better on the ACT than the SAT. William took the pre-ACT in September.

"They certainly have moved his score [on practice tests]. And regardless of what he gets, at the end of the day, his confidence level is so much better," she says. "They are very teachable tests; this child is proof of that. It's money well spent, even though it's not inexpensive."

Newcomer declined to specify how much Bulldog Tutor services cost,

saying: "Package prices are highly variable and depend on a lot of different factors."

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

In addition to its for-profit tutoring services, Bulldog Tutors works with local public schools and nonprofits. Typically in those partnerships, Newcomer says, services are offered at discounted rates and the company doesn't make any money off them – it's just the right thing to do.

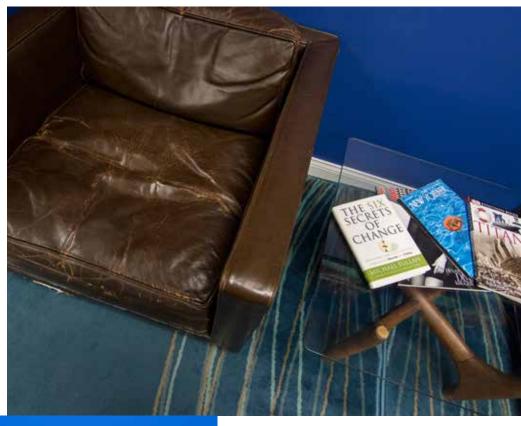
"I grew up in a relatively poor area of the country. A lot of the students [in New Haven] – at least socioeconomically – look a lot like me and my friends growing up," says Newcomer, a Kentucky native. "Those students wouldn't necessarily have access to tutoring like this without our company. There's a pretty marked impact."

Bulldog's job in those partnerships, he adds, is bridging a gap.

"There are all these great tutors, but they don't know how [to reach students in need]," Newcomer says. "On the other side, there are all these students who need this, but they don't know how [to find it]. It seems silly for us not to match those two markets up, given the position we're in."

The benefit to students is significant, says Elvert Eden, director of youth development and aquatics at LEAP. The New Haven nonprofit provides afterschool and summer programs for local children and teens, most of whom are at-risk and low-income.

For two years, Bulldog Tutors has been offering PSAT and SAT prep classes to LEAP participants, and this past spring, the company launched a six-part series of creative writing workshops for 13- to 15-year-old students. Those who have completed the test





ABOVE: A pair of well worn leather chairs passed on to Bulldog Tutors from Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library add a touch of retro decor to the waiting room.

LEFT: Good old-fashioned pencils can easily be found in the tutoring rooms at Bulldog Tutors in New Haven. Each room is appropriately painted in Yale Bulldog Blue.

prep courses, in particular, say they feel less nervous heading into standardized tests, Eden says.

"Parents love that it's integrated into our program," he adds. The teens are improving their test scores, he says, "but the bigger thing is they seem more confident."

If not for the partnership with Bulldog Tutors, LEAP families could not afford similar tutoring services, Eden says.

Over the past two years, 50 students have participated in PSAT courses, 50 participated in SAT courses, and 20 took part in creative writing workshops.

"I thoroughly enjoy the instructors' enthusiasm for teaching. They are very professional. They have very good teaching skills, which allow the kids to retain the material," he says. "They have a very diverse staff, with different cultures, different backgrounds. It's great for students to see people who look like them and [who are] also young enough that they feel comfortable asking questions."

Eden says he was drawn to Bulldog Tutors largely because it's a local company.

"We can really connect with them,"

"They've shown over the last couple of years that they're committed to students' success in and around New Haven."

- Elvert Eden

he says. "They're right around the corner and always available. They always accommodate our schedule and our requests. They've shown over the last couple of years that they're committed to students' success in and around New Haven."

Standardized tests, and the pressure to perform well on them, can cause fear and stress in all students who have to take them, regardless of their background or circumstance, Newcomer notes.

"It's a high-pressure time and high-anxiety time, and the pressure is on both the parents and the kids, to be honest," Newcomer says. That's part of why he loves his job and his company.

"Tutoring allows you to have a real impact on people's lives. I think we've had a real impact on customers," he says. "That's really rewarding in a lot of ways."



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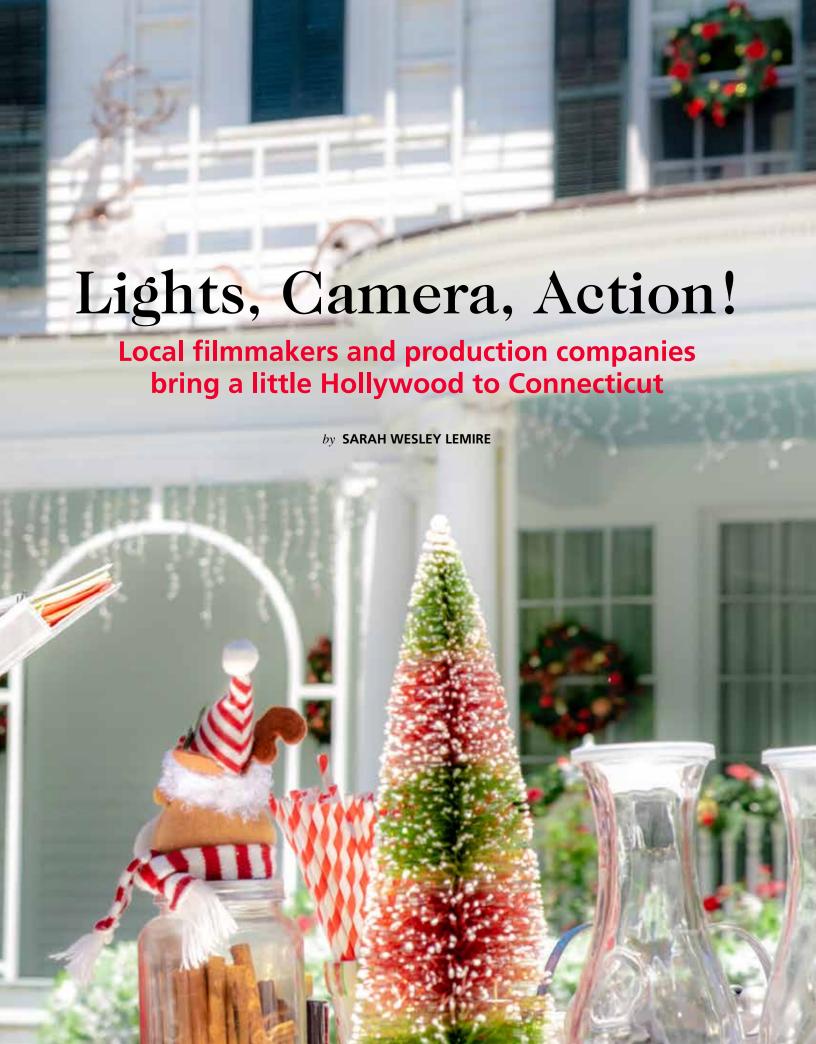
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t's an unseasonably warm October afternoon, but in Old Wethersfield it's Christmastime.

Shop windows are adorned with garland, there's snow on the sidewalks and the Hurlbut-Dunham House, a historic landmark located in the center of town, is gearing up for a holiday party.

Inside the 18th century Victorian, preparations are underway with tree-trimming and Christmas cards being hung by crew members, busily finalizing details before it's time to shoot the scene.

It's the last day of filming on the set of the Hallmark Channel film "Christmas on Honeysuckle Lane," and with merely weeks to go before it airs, the team at Synthetic Cinema International is working under a short deadline.

"Movie days are long," says Andrew Gernhard, producer and owner of the Rocky Hill-based motion picture and production company.

"Yesterday, I worked a 20-hour day; I got home at midnight and had to be up at 4 a.m. to get back to the set for 6 o'clock."

However, the extended hours are worth it, considering film is what Gernhard is passionate about.

"I consider myself the most fortunate man in the world," he says. "I love movies of every genre. I love working in movies, no matter how hard it is, or how awful or great it is."





BEHIND THE SCENES: Producer Andrew Gernhard (left) with director Nick Everhart on the set of "Imposter?" in 2017. Photo courtesy of Synthetic Cinema International.



WINTER WONDERLAND: The wizards at Synthetic Cinema added a backdrop of artificial snow before the crew began filming "Christmas on Honeysuckle Lane" on location at the Silas Robbins House in Old Wethersfield this fall. Photo courtesy of Synthetic Cinema International.





As a young filmmaker and fan of director Steven Spielberg, Gernhard got his start in 2000 after making a shot-by-shot parody of Spielberg's "Jaws" - called "Trees" - which features a man-eating, great white – wait for it – pine tree.

By sheer luck, the release of the SNL-style spoof coincided with the 25th anniversary of the original, and Gernhard's film went national.

"Every Blockbuster in America bought, like, 10 copies," says Gerhard, laughing. "So 80,000 units on VHS of this stupid, awful movie called 'Trees' went all over the place."

Capitalizing on its success, in 2004, Gernhard produced the tongue-in-cheek sequel, "Trees 2: The Root of All Evil," which, unfortunately, wasn't met with the same reception.

Discouraged, he took a break until distributers began contacting him, seeking more films.

He obliged, and since then, has been involved in the production of more than 30 movies, all filmed in Connecticut except for one.

While much of his early work is largely concentrated on horror flicks, more recent years have seen Gernhard producing a variety of other types of films, including the 2014 production of "Wishin' and Hopin'," a drama comedy based on the New York Times best-selling novella by acclaimed author and Connecticut resident, Wally Lamb. The movie, which aired on the Lifetime channel, starred Molly Ringwald and was narrated by Chevy Chase.

Gernhard says the movie was one of his favorites, along with the 2017 film "Romance at Reindeer Lodge."

"That was a last-minute film for Hallmark. We actually had to make it and deliver it within six weeks. which is insane," he says.

Despite the frenetic pace, he says, things went smoothly and it was a movie he truly enjoyed making.

"It was kind of great just to see all this fake snow and [it had this] magical atmosphere; there's just something about it."

Finding a niche in the genre, Gernhard has also produced "A Very Merry Toy Store," starring Melissa



A CONNECTICUT CHRISTMAS: Jessica Lowndes and Michael Rady starred in Hallmark's "Christmas at Pemberley Manor," filmed in Essex and Old Lyme. It began airing on The Hallmark Channel in October, attracting millions of viewers. Photo courtesy of The Hallmark Channel/Crown Media Holdings, Inc.



Joan Hart and Mario Lopez, along with "Christmas at Pemberley Manor" and "A Very Nutty Christmas."

A Norwich native, he's returned to his hometown to shoot many of his films and says that Connecticut is the ideal location, especially when making holiday movies.

"When anyone thinks 'classic Christmas,' it's all New England architecture, landscapes, so I think that's why a lot of these companies are interested in Connecticut ... for that 'Christmas in New England' kind of feel."

With multiple projects in current, pre- and postproduction, Gernhard is flush with work, which he says translates into jobs for actors and film crews throughout the state.

And though he once aspired to be the next George

Lucas, he says that his career and subsequent success in filmmaking is more than he could have hoped for.

"I look back at my life, and what I've achieved, what we're working on, have worked on, and I could not have done it any better; I could not be happier with the way everything has turned out."

Goodnight Film - Essex

A.D. Calvo didn't get into filmmaking until later in

After working in software and technology for many years, as his 40th birthday approached, he began rethinking his vocation for two reasons: his father had passed away at a young age, and advances in digital technology allowed what had been a long-time desire, to become a reality.



"I had always wanted to be a filmmaker as a child, so I embraced the technology and jumped in," he says.

Fueled by a quote he read suggesting that if you can become successful doing something you don't like, you can do even better doing something you love, he took the leap in 2005, establishing Goodnight Films in Wallingford.

"I was not afraid at all because I felt like it was almost some destiny," he says. "I really felt like this was exactly what I needed to be doing at this point in time."

After making a few short films, Calvo penned the screenplay for his first feature-length project, "The Other Side of the Tracks," a suspense film about a man haunted by the memories of his girlfriend, who was killed in a train accident.

Through a mutual friend, his script ended up in the hands of some Hollywood producers, who liked it enough to sign on as executive producers, giving it legs and credibility.

"We were able to get the film to Showtime on a two-year rotation," he says.

The success of the project resulted in more work for Calvo, and soon he began production on another film, this time with a bigger budget and higher-profile

"Then the Lehman Brothers collapse happened in September of 2008 and everything just unwound. So a year's worth of work went out the window."

Despite the setback, Calvo was eager to continue working, subsequently writing and directing a second independent film, before deciding to take a break in



order to direct films written by other screenwriters. Neither proved to be satisfying.

"All these films got distribution," he says, "but I had a bar that I wanted to hit – critically, and in terms of if I looked back on the work and was happy with it. And I wasn't quite hitting that bar."

So, in 2013, he shifted gears, writing and directing "The Missing Girl," a suspenseful, dark comedy centered around the owner of a comic book shop and the young graphic novelist he's hired, which Calvo filmed in New London.

Starring veteran actor Robert Longstreet (currently

appearing on the Netflix show "The Haunting of Hill House"), the film screened and was well-received at the acclaimed Toronto International Film Festival in 2015, as well as making the rounds at multiple other accredited festivals throughout the country and in Europe.

In 2016, he completed his next project, "Sweet, Sweet Lonely Girl," a horror movie filmed in and around Vernon, and currently featured on SHUDDER, AMC Networks' subscription horror-film streaming service.

Calvo says because Connecticut is among the oldest





NEW DIRECTION: A.D. Calvo with Erin Wilhelmi on the set of "Sweet, Sweet Lonely Girl." Photo by Robert Wise.



states in the country, it serves as a great backdrop for his films, which often feature elements of loneliness, dread and atmosphere.

"I find that this area has a lot of texture," he says. "We're going to find a lot of those gothic or old New England villages and haunting kind of areas, or areas that are just stuck in time and have a period kind of feel to them, which is often so hard to recreate."

When he's writing, he often visualizes places in the state that he's familiar with or has driven past. "It helps with the storytelling to have a sense of place," he says. "Visually and physically, Connecticut has been great and inspirational to my stories."

In sum, Calvo has done six feature films and is currently working on his seventh, a follow-up to "Sweet, Sweet Lonely Girl," which begins shooting next year.

"We're hoping to take it to another level – bigger budget, bringing on bigger names, talent," he says.

If things go according to plan, it'll be released in 2020.

As for Calvo, who recently relocated Goodnight Film to Essex, he hasn't looked back since making his leap of faith more than 14 years ago.

"It's the art; you do it because you love it," he says. "It's been a humbling but very rewarding experience."

Shadow | Vale Productions - Cromwell

Somewhere along the way to becoming a lawyer, Cromwell native David Gere became a model, actor, stunt man and film producer instead.

A student at Providence College in Rhode Island in 1996, Gere took a film class where he was introduced to Peter Farrelly, an alumnus, as well as director and writer of hit films like "Dumb and Dumber" and "There's Something About Mary."



"We initially had a casual meeting and then I was offered a role in 'Outside Providence,' a film starring Alec Baldwin based on a book Peter had written," Gere says. "That started my journey on set and earned me entry into the Screen Actors Guild."

For nearly a decade, Gere worked as an actor,

accumulating an impressive IMDB list of credits in films like "War of the Worlds" and "Rocky Balboa" and the television series "Gossip Girl."

He also performed stunts in more than 18 movies, including "The Dark Knight Rises" and "The Purge: Election Year."

But acting didn't always prove to be

"I would drive to New York City, have a oneminute audition and not have any idea of the context, if I had a shot at the role, or what the feedback might be, and [I'd] turn right around go back to Connecticut, always kind of wondering."

That uncertainty proved to be a catalyst, motivating Gere to become more involved in how things operated behind the camera, as opposed to in front of it.

"Really, the decisions are made in the boardroom, or among the executives or producers in terms of how films are structured, who gets in films, whether they're independent or studio," he says, "and I felt this propensity towards wanting to learn more, to understand it. It's a big mystery when you first start out, especially as an actor."

While continuing to act, Gere began branching out, making connections and becoming increasingly involved in the business end of film production.

"When I got into a position to learn the business, I realized that I really might have a good mind for producing, and started to produce some smaller, independent films. I played them close to home in



ACTING OUT: David Gere as Agent Johnson in "Black Wake" (2017). Photo by Ryan Sweeney, @ Red Entertainment.



some help from friends and family and resources I had access to."

Before long, he began producing larger projects, shooting both locally and nationally from New York to Los Angeles.

Since 2012, he's been involved with the production of more than 40 films including "Bleed for This," the story of boxer Vinny Pazienza, starring Miles Teller and "The Opposite Sex," a comedy featuring Mena Suvari and Kristin Chenoweth.

In addition to working with several different production companies, Gere, along with partner, Chelsea Vale, recently launched Shadow | Vale Productions, a production company based in Los Angeles and Cromwell.

He strives to do as many films in Connecticut as he's able because it allows him to give back to the state and his community.

"I'm just so grateful for being able to do what I love, involving dozens, if not hundreds, of people

that I know in these projects." Gere says he's pleased that he's been able to "give a break" to the many crewmembers and actors from Connecticut who have played a role in his films.

Gere is currently in production on several films, including "My Adventures With Santa," a holiday film shot in Meriden, Middletown and Cromwell, starring Denise Richards, Barbara Eden and Patrick Muldoon, which is set to be released in 2019.

He's also working on a new project for Netflix, as well as a crime thriller called "Five Times Thirty-Eight," slated to begin shooting in Connecticut next year. His recently completed film "Vault," a period crime piece, is scheduled for a spring 2019 release.

"I want to continue to make great feature films," he says, "and up the ante in terms of the scope. I want to really play some great projects to Connecticut and continue the longevity of that process for myself, my company, and all the people I work with here."

Growing Investments

At GSB Wealth Management, business is personal.

by JAMES BATTAGLIO / photography by TONY BACEWICZ

hortly after meeting with the principals of GSB Wealth Management LLC (GSBWM), one comes to realize several things: to call them merely "brokers" would be a misnomer. In fact, the term "broker" couldn't be further from the truth. They love their work and their community, and are close to their clients, whom they've come to call "neighbors."

The three people who head GSBWM – Deborah Abildsoe, CEO and founder, Brant Walker, senior vice president, and Connor Dolan, vice president (recently named one of *Forbes Magazine*'s 1,000 "Top Ten Next-Gen Wealth Advisors") – are friends, community sponsors, and at times even psychologists, especially in times of extreme market volatility.

Located in a beautifully appointed fieldstone and stucco building at 2614 Boston Post Road behind the "Gatehouse," GSBWM, formerly Asset & Retirement Investment Associates, is about to celebrate its 20th anniversary as a firm that has mastered the art of personalizing and customizing its investment strategy in a manner that is the antithesis of the larger brokerage houses and banks.

The firm is firmly rooted in Guilford but has clients across the United States as well as in continental Europe and Scandinavia.

Deb, Brant and Connor (as they like to be called) oversee approximately \$250 million in client assets, with account values ranging from \$25,000 to \$10 million. The firm's philosophy and approach are explicitly designed to differentiate the organization from the larger, brand-name institutions.

"Somehow there is a sense out there that bigger is safer," says Abildsoe, but that isn't necessarily true. A case in point is the period of 2008-2009, when many large financial institutions failed or needed to be bailed out by the government. Many smaller firms like GSBWM, sticking to their knitting in investment management, managed their way through the financial crisis in fine shape. That was a difficult period, and anybody with investments suffered temporary losses, but firms like GSBWM that don't participate in lending and derivative products came out on the other side healthy and intact.

Other members of the GSBWM team include Colleen

Venter, chief compliance officer, and Kristine Jermine, head of operations. "Throughout our near 20-year history, we have not lost sight of our original objective: to apply a wealth of experience for our clients and their portfolios, tailoring each to the unique desire and needs of the individual," says Abildsoe.

In short, GSBWM goes out of its way to avoid potentially expensive, "cookie cutter" approaches to investing, according to its officers. They believe that "no two clients are alike," and therefore shouldn't have to settle for the pre-programmed portfolios that many larger institutions offer. GSBWM spends an inordinate amount of time with clients, taking into consideration their personal situations, fears, family conditions, spending habits, debt, and other factors, before arriving at the decision that "this is the type of portfolio this client should have."

GSBWM constructs portfolios using mainly individual stocks and bonds. Many of their larger competitors' layer in product – for example, populating a portfolio with mutual funds, hedge funds, derivatives and third-party managed product, investments that have relatively high internal expenses and fees. The manager then adds his or her own "oversight" fee, resulting in a portfolio that is expensive to manage. The higher the internal fees paid by the client, the lower the client's long-term return.

"At GSBWM, you see our quarterly fee listed on your statement, letting you know exactly what you're paying for. Additionally, you can look in the financial section of your local paper and find listings of most of the investments we utilize," says Abildsoe.

In 2011, 12 years after GSBWM was founded, the firm became an independent subsidiary of Guilford Savings Bank and made a conscious decision to become a friend and supporter of its community.

Abildsoe brings more than 45 years of experience to the investment arena, including many years with Den Norske Bank, Norway's largest commercial bank. Forty-five years ago, after finishing her education in France, she took a friend up on an offer to visit Norway and wound up staying 20 years.

"I took the long way home," says Abildsoe, who is also the mother of two children (now living in Norway and Denmark) and grandmother of four. "This is my first time in 25 years since returning from Norway that I have not



GSB Wealth Management team Brant Walker, senior vice president, Deborah Abildsoe, president and CEO, and Connor Dolan, vice president.



been on a board of directors." She quips: "I'm taking care of a husband who just retired!"

Walker, who serves as portfolio manager as well as senior VP, moved east from an Indiana farming community when he was 25. After spending most of his career working for larger banks, he joined GSBWM in 2012 with an eye toward building quality, customized portfolios for clients and giving back to the community. In his personal life, he is the father of 22- and 24-year-old daughters.

"What I have accomplished financially here on the East Coast is far above and beyond what I thought I was capable of," he says. "I feel one has to give something back. I'm pretty involved in our church – we do mission trips and it's a lot of fun."

Classifying himself as a "passionate investment management professional," Walker is a firm believer that "if you build your house [portfolio] properly the first time, it needs a lot less maintenance [trading] later."

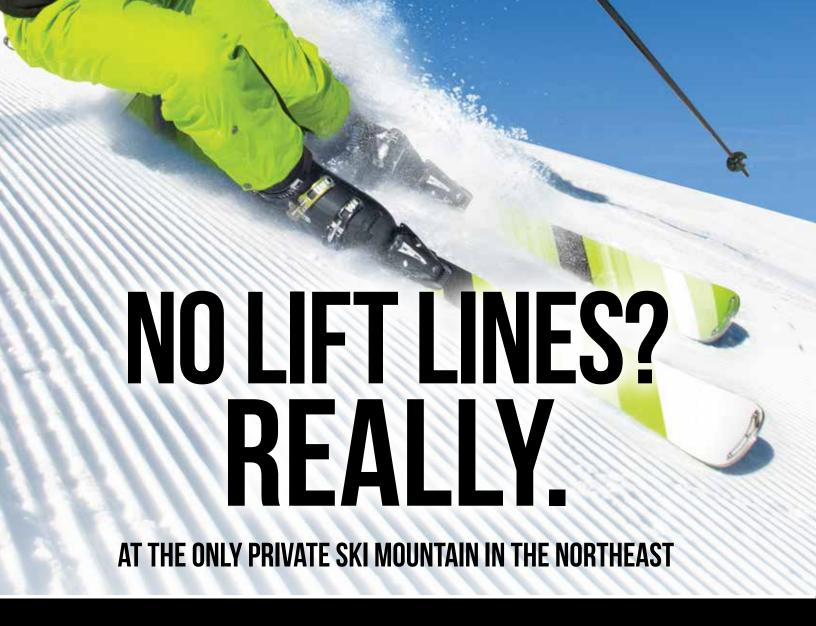
He recounts a recent experience involving a former \$10 million client who returned to GSBWM after managing his investments for the past 11 years on his own. "I worked at a great investment firm that was bought out by a large bank. Most of the investment professionals soon left. I had a one-year non-compete agreement that prohibited me from working with this client. I told him that his portfolio was well constructed and in good shape, and that he could now manage it on his own, which he did. After 11 years, he recently called me, wanting to come to GSBWM. I was humbled by that. It's a testament to treating someone properly – giving good advice way back when. Our job is to preserve the client's principal and then grow it. That's what makes us unique.'

Dolan explains, "The approach of many large financial firms is: 'Try to do as much business as you can rather than do business only when it's appropriate.' After a thoughtful, respectful conversation with clients, we may say, 'The best thing you can do is to leave your money in Guilford Savings Bank.' Wealth management is basically helping people manage their financial assets, and that is individually defined. Some people may say being wealthy is having \$50,000 to \$100,000, while others may define it as \$10 million."

Dolan, the father of a 3-year-old and 1-year old twins, began his career in the financial services industry 15 years ago in Florida, but later chose to work closer to home, in Connecticut. After working at Morgan Stanley, he joined Guilford Savings Bank in 2008.

The personalized, caring approach taken by Abildsoe, Walker and Dolan results in clients who are both neighbors and friends.

"We do our due diligence with everyone who walks through our door," Dolan says. "We identify who they are, their spending habits, and their retirement ambitions. A rigorous financial review and understanding must occur before we can establish a proper portfolio. Wealth management is not the end game."

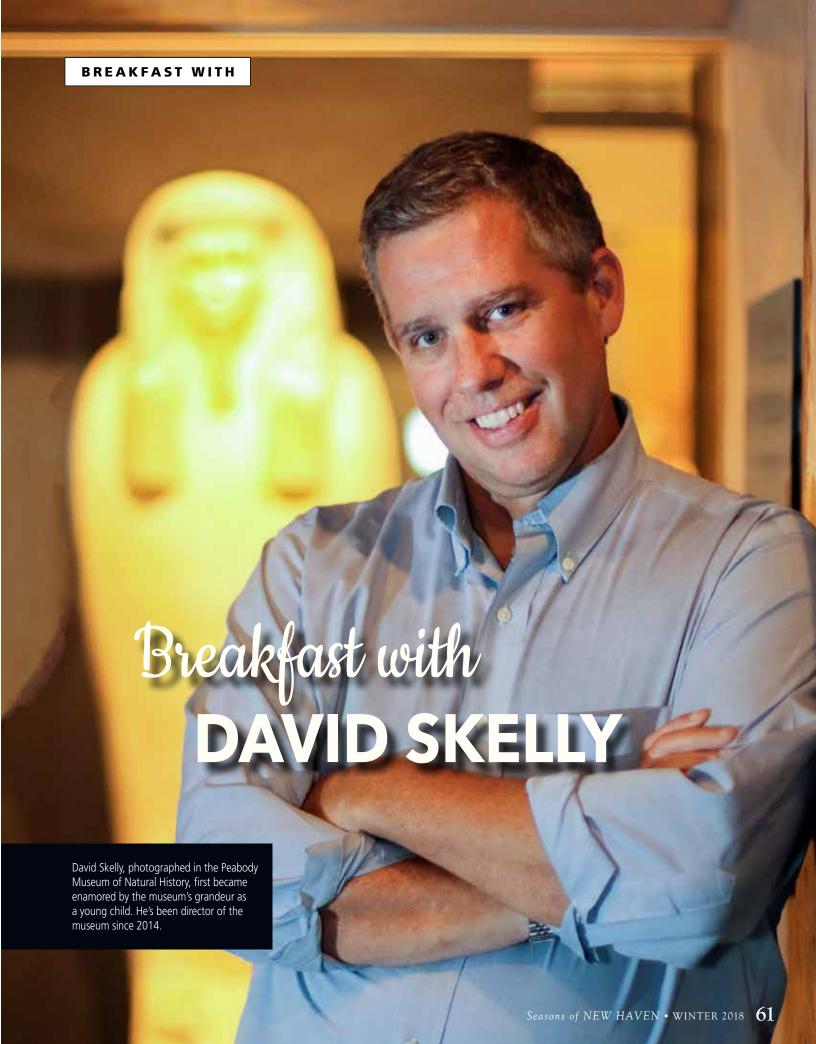


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s one of the oldest and biggest museums of its kind worldwide, with more than 13 million objects, there's a lot to love about the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History. David K. Skelly, its director, fell in love with it at a very early age. He became the Peabody's director in 2014, but his first memories of walking into the Whitney Avenue building date back to when he was preschool aged.

In addition to leading the museum, he is the Frank R. Oastler Professor of Ecology at the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies at Yale University. Prior to being named director at the Peabody, he was associate dean and director of doctoral studies at the forestry and environmental school, where he has been a faculty member since 1996. He's also a field biologist who has authored more than 80 papers.

But long before the high-profile jobs at Yale, Skelly says, the path to his career began when he was a young "dinosaur kid," fascinated by the world around him.

He recently took time out of a busy day to discuss what he loves about the Peabody and New Haven.

Q: What's your earliest memory of visiting a museum?

A: That goes way back. I've been coming to the [Peabody] museum since somewhere in the four- to five-years-old range. I can vividly remember walking into the Great Hall for the first time and seeing the dinosaurs, particularly the Brontosaurus, and just feeling that feeling when the hairs

on the back of your next go up. Fast forward many years ... and I had a job interview at Yale and they asked if there's anything I wanted to see while I was in town and I said, "I want to go to the Peabody Museum." And I still get that feeling.

Q: What was it about natural history that drew vou to the field?

A: I don't feel like I chose my profession; I just always was interested in the natural world. I was always interested in animals, in particular. I always wanted to be outdoors. And once I discovered dinosaurs, I became one of those dinosaur kids for many years. That led to a broader interest in ecology and the environment.

Q: What do you think is the coolest exhibit at the Peabody?

A: I have many, many favorites. I would have to say that it's our fossil turtle; its name is Archelon. It's not only one of the biggest turtles that ever lived – Archelon has a personal narrative. This animal appears to have lived at least part of its adult life with only three out of its four limbs. The right hind limb is missing.

When the animal was discovered in the 1800s, it was in a posture that sea turtles today are known to adopt when they do the sea turtle equivalent of hibernating. That suggests the animal lived an uneventful part of its life after, probably, something gigantic took a significant portion of its leg. The most likely answer is that a Mosasaur, a very large relative

of lizards that was a big predator, just took a piece of this poor animal off and swam off with it. That has just always captured my imagination.

Q: Which exhibit is most popular with visitors?

A: The dinosaurs are always a big draw. There's often a line to get into the Discovery Room, which is where we have the live animal displays. A couple of years ago, we opened David Friend Hall (which showcases gems and minerals) and that has joined the other two as one of the favorite spaces. There's always a good crowd of people in there. The setting in there is different; there's much more attention given to the way everything in there is set and lit, and it provides drama.

Q: What is your favorite way to spend a day in **New Haven?**

A: New Haven is a wonderful place for museums and for culture. For a city its size, we are just so incredibly blessed. My wife and I love taking our kids to the Yale Art Gallery, Yale Center for British Art, the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library. This is such a rich environment for museums.

Q: Where is your favorite place to grab lunch or

A: My wife (Kealoha Freidenburg, a research scientist



and lecturer at Yale) is Hawaiian, so the poke places have loomed large on our radar since they popped up. I love good poke. We have this village of food carts on Science Hill and that's also a favorite

Q: What's your favorite time of year in the city?

A: The fall here, around the time the Yale students show up, is a beautiful time of year. There's just such a great energy as the students pour in here. It's one of my favorite times of year.







Mind, Body & Soul

mActivity is a different kind of fitness center.

By FRANK RIZZO / Photography by STAN GODLEWSKI

alk through the doors of mActivity and you might ask, "Where's the gym?" In the sun-drenched front area of this Valhalla of wellness in the East Rock section of New Haven. you might see people curled up with a book in a leather sofa in its living room-like setting, or seated in a pair of chairs chatting, or hunched over their laptops at a work table. Look to the left and there might be a group in the conference area planning a community event. Feeling peckish? There's a cafe and a wooden bar area, too – open to the public – that serves wraps, salads and snacks. There might even be musicians performing out front.

Sure, there are rows of treadmills, stair-climbers, ellipticals, rowing machines and cross-trainers, too, way off in the distance. But visitors first walk past the curated art exhibit, a physical therapy area, an office for nutritional coaching, and banquettes designed for tête-à-têtes.

Once in the gym area, open a few doors and find yoga or Zumba classes, Pilates sessions and cycling rooms with screens that offer virtual landscapes. Changing rooms feature both sauna and steam relief.

For nearly three years now, mActivity's 18,000 square feet of converted light industrial space at 285 Nicoll St. has become a holistic wellness center for mind, body and spirit.

"It's the whole package," says member Ian Huelke, a personal trainer from New London who has clients in New Haven. "You have everything you need. But it's also the atmosphere. It has a kind of charisma."



RESEARCH TO REALITY

The idea of a different kind of fitness center began six years ago when Burch Valldejuli and Pablo Perez, who both grew up in the area, started talking about combining their skills, experience and vision.

Since 2007, Valldejuli was the director of program development at the Yale School of Public Health, a position







MACTIVITY IS IN SUPPORT OF YOUR PHYSICAL, SOCIAL AND **EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING.**

A space for live musical performances and art shows, a bustling cafe and various gathering spots are just a few of the features mActivity boasts.



she described as highly entrepreneurial and collaborative. It was similar to a role she held previously at Harvard University, where she earned her Ed.M. in counseling and consulting psychology. She left academia in 2014 after her youngest child graduated from college, eager to start a new chapter of her life — and to put her decades' worth of research into reality.

"I didn't just want to study public health," she says. "I wanted to implement it and do what it is was we were studying and espousing for so long. Everything we do here is evidence-based and from peer review journals."

Perez followed an All-American rugby career and a degree in business at the University of Connecticut with a career in the fitness service industry, creating Core Fitness in North Haven, where Valldejuli was a client. It was there that they began planning their synchronistic dream project.

It was rooted in creating a more expansive culture of health that went beyond weights, reps, spins, and steps, that even went beyond self – to community.

"People are so looking for connections in this Internet age," says Valldejuli. "Our tagline is that mActivity is in support of your physical, social and emotional wellbeing, which is actually the mission of the World Health

Organization. We have all of those components under one roof."

Valldejuli and Pascal knew they would be entering a highly competitive arena of fitness and exercise centers.

"They have their own thing and we have ours," she says. "We wanted to create our own uniqueness," says Perez.

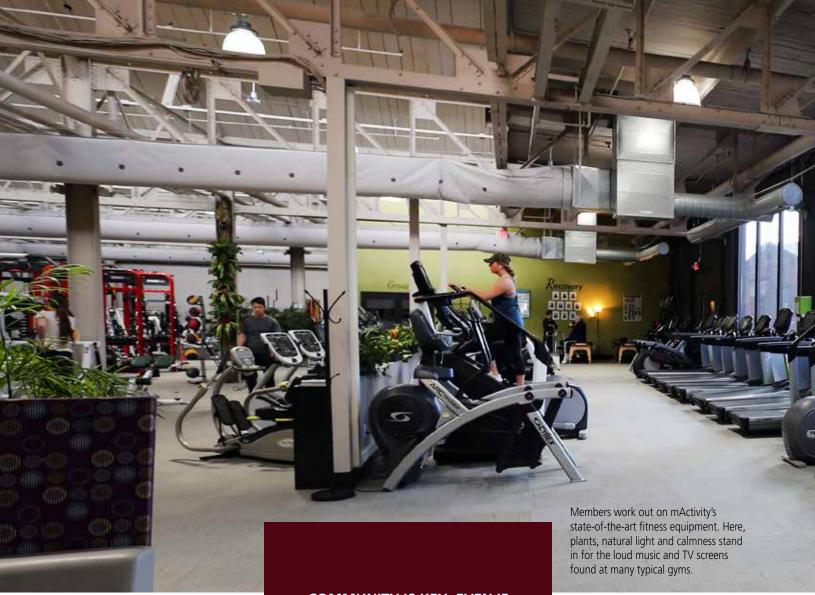
LOCATION, LOCATION

But finding the right location was a challenge. At first, they looked around downtown New Haven, not far from the hospitals and medical services. But real estate was at a premium there.

When they looked at the light industrial area in the Goatville section of the East Rock neighborhood, they felt they found the perfect spot. It was accessible to downtown while also tapping into the Yale neighborhood, East Rock Park hiking and running trails, track fields of a nearby school, community tennis courts and Interstate 91.

Space became available in the RSCC Wire & Cable building, which had previously been used to refurbish and resell cable and fiber optic machinery.

After the interior of this section of the property was renovated and designed for the fitness center by architect



Fernando Pastor of SEEDnh, following the guidelines set by Valldejuli and Perez, mActivity opened in early 2016.

"It's all about the customer, and knowing what that person is looking for and understanding how that customer feels walking through the door," says Valldejuli. "We didn't want to be gymintimidating for somebody who

may not have a great body image. We wanted something that was welcoming to everyone, that people could imagine themselves being part of, being engaged in."

They point to a mActivity blog entry by a member who said she first came with her husband, who worked out while she sat in the lounge area and read. Gradually, she became so comfortable being there, she, too, ventured further in and eventually joined her husband in the gym.

"If you hang out in a barbershop long enough," Valldejuli says, "you're going to get a haircut."

COMMUNITY IS KEY, EVEN IF YOU JUST COME FOR COFFEE OR SWING BY TO PICK UP THE **WEEKLY DROP-OFF FROM** CONNECTICUT COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE.

NO STRESS

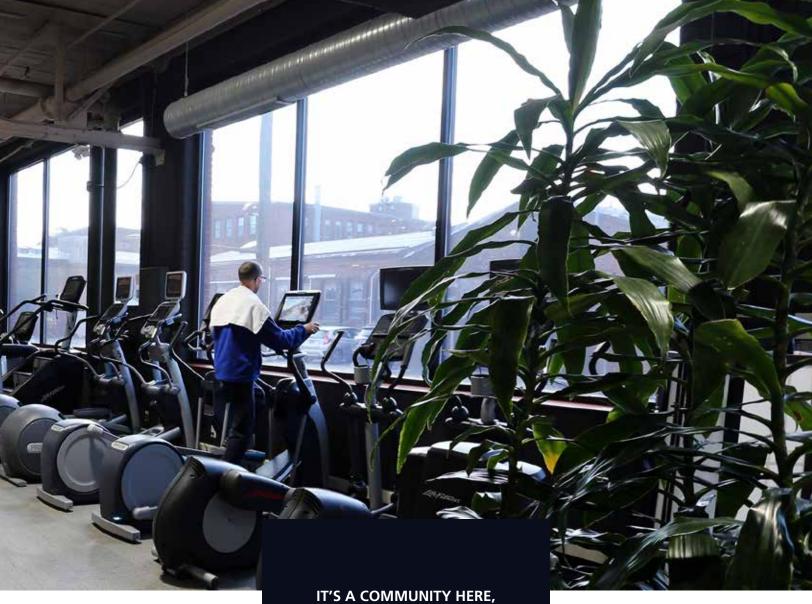
Many people, says Perez, exercise to reduce anxiety, for peace of mind – and a calming atmosphere is central to their concept. You won't find throbbing music and stressinducing televisions with CNN reports. Instead, there are lots of plants, natural light, and an inviting bar repurposed from

Doug Flutie's old watering hole. (No booze here; just smoothies.)

There are only mirrors where necessary, says Valldejuli, "because research has found that people don't want to look at themselves as they work out."

But the social aspect of mActivity is just as important as the zen.

Community is key, even if you just come for coffee or swing by to pick up the weekly drop-off from Connecticut Community Supported Agriculture. Nonprofit groups hold their meetings here for free. On the first Thursday of every



YET YOU CAN ALSO COME

WORK OUT AND HAVE TOTAL

ANONYMITY IF THAT'S WHAT

YOU WANT, TOO.

month, mActivity hosts a party with food, music and drink where members and guests can connect with each other socially. The music series happened "organically" with the suggestion that the lounge could be an inviting venue for live entertainment, too. The idea for curated art exhibitions also happened that way. The center has also planned a spoken word

series. Its first big event was a fashion show by local designer Neville Wisdom. mActivity even hosted a wedding reception.

But do all the extras make a difference for someone who just wants to work out?

"For me, it does," says Robert Tagliaferi, who lives in the neighborhood and has been a member since it opened. "The social factor is important to me, too. mActivity is involved in a lot of social justice activities and fundraisers. It's a community here, yet you can also come work out and have total anonymity if that's what you want, too.

It combines the best of both worlds"

There are members who mix work and workouts, toiling away on their laptops in the workroom or lounge. Author Amy Bloom is a member, and others have written books, essays and school papers there. One grad student thanked mActivity in his dissertation.

"It's a great place for writers," says Valldejuli. "If you get stuck, we'll watch your stuff. You can work out and clear your head, get rid of your writer's block and then come back to the laptop."

A GROWING ENTERPRISE

The popularity of mActivity has proven to be a draw for other startups in the remaining 180,000-square-foot space available in the factory complex. Just opened are the adjacent salon Rebel and the East Rock Brewing Company, creating a trifecta of health, hair and happiness.

"You feel good, you look good, and then you have a great night," laughs Meagan Jones, owner of Rebel. And her reason for placing her business here? "I could just see that this was a growing social area and a good spot for me to come in and grow with them."

There are also plans to duplicate the mActivity template into franchise operations in other cities, through an entity called mActivity Intenational, Perez says.

"We're now starting to market it and are looking at other locations," he says.

As for the name mActivity, what does it mean?

"We wanted a brand that was more than New Haven or East Rock or anything with the word 'fitness,' which suggests the gym," says Perez. "We needed to find

that one word – even if it was made up name like Uber or Starbucks."

They liked the dynamic of the word "activity" which could mean physical but also social energy. And having the "m" before "Activity," they felt, gives it ambiguity that could mean different things to different people.

It could denote "mindful," "my," "measured," "modern" or "motivated."

> For Valldejuli and Perez, perhaps the word is "meaning."

"There's not a day after all these years that I don't walk into this beautiful space and still go, 'Wow'," says Valldejuli. "Like Field of Dreams, if you build it, they will come."



"THERE'S NOT A DAY

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

THAT I DON'T WALK INTO

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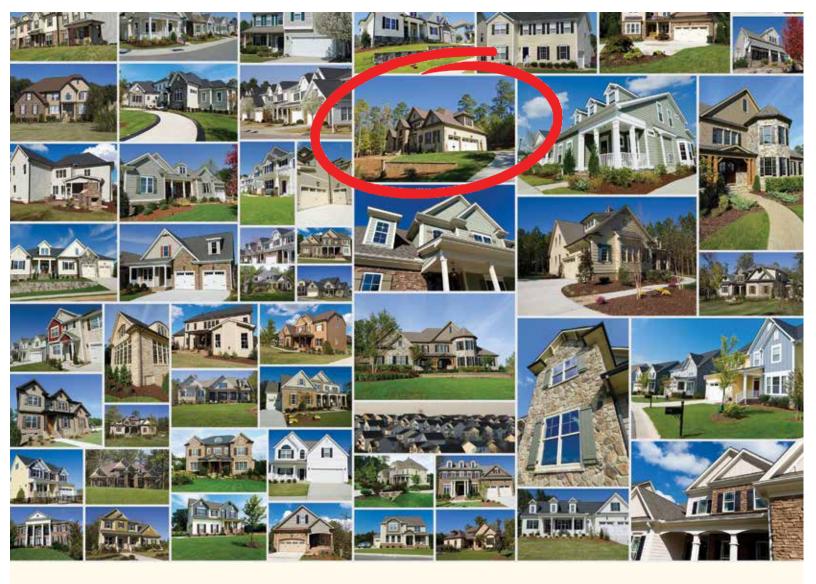
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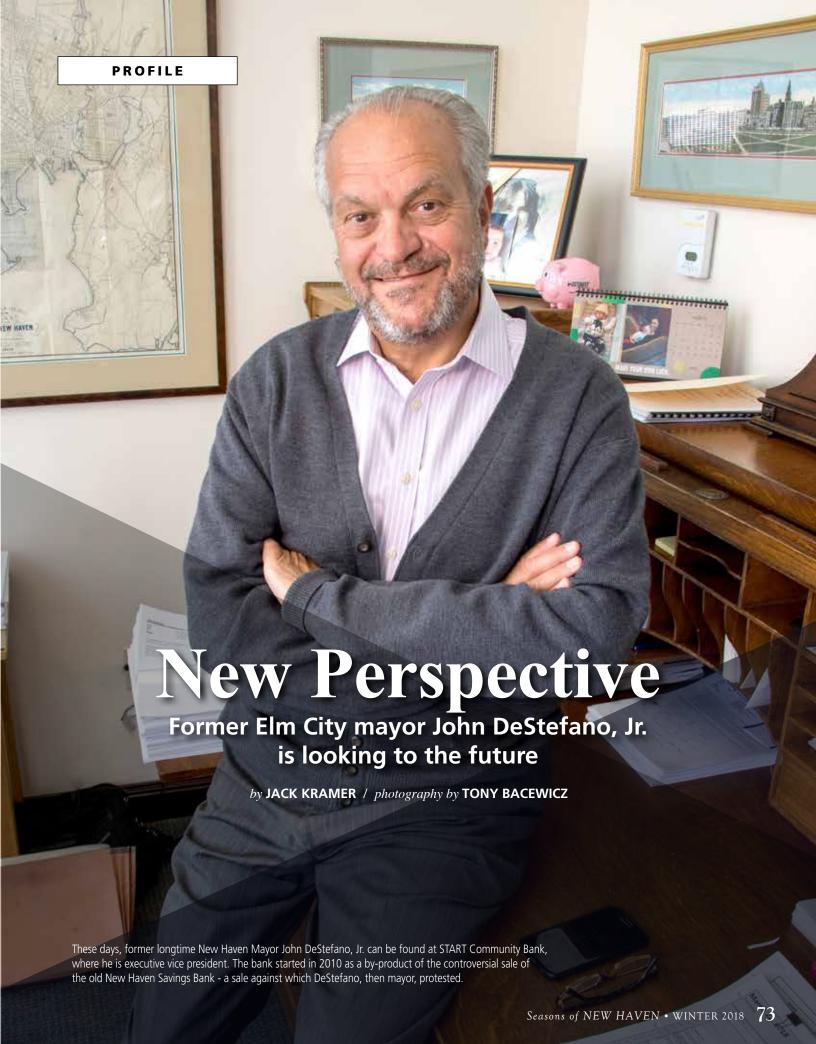


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rying to get former New Haven Mayor John DeStefano, Jr. to give his political views these days is a difficult – if not impossible – task. It's not because he's being contrary. Quite the opposite; the man who spent 20 years running the city is in a different, much more tranquil place these days.

There is a lot he'll talk about – his current job as executive vice president of START Community Bank, not working 15-hour days and weekends, his two homes in New Haven and Florida, and teaching at Yale University.

And he'll talk about his family, especially his new granddaughter, pointing proudly to a picture of her in his office.

"Isn't she beautiful?" he beams. "Being a grandfather is everything everybody says it would be. I love it."

DeStefano would just rather not talk politics.

"I loved serving as mayor," says the 63 year old. "But that's done and over with. I had my time. I just don't feel the need to be the critical. What purpose does that serve?"

To this day, many in the city still refer to DeStefano as "Mr. Mayor."

"I feel very lucky. I saw a lot of people leave office because they lost. I picked the right time to walk away," he says. "It's good to leave while most people want you to stay. I miss the people, but I don't miss the fights." Those fights, he admits, took their toll.

"It made me short with people at times," he recalls. "I do regret that, looking back. At times, the pressure got the best of me."

These days, many see a more mellow DeStefano.

Journalist Paul Bass has covered DeStefano for decades, first as a reporter at the New Haven Advocate and then as the editor of the New Haven Independent.

"John has had a Jimmy Carter-like transition, in my opinion – thriving in retirement as an active, engaged elder statesman influencing our community in positive ways, from his teaching to his stewardship of the bank to his open ear to anyone seeking advice," says Bass.

"He's still making a difference while clearly enjoying the peace that comes from not having to engage in the political fight," Bass adds. "And he has made a point not to trash people still in that fight. This has been the most respectful dynamic I've observed between a former and current mayor in 40 years."

DeStefano is proud that when his tenure as mayor was over it was, well, over.

After deciding not to seek an 11th term, on New Years' Eve 2013 – technically his last day in office – he and his wife Kathy, "really had a blast at a Billy Joel concert at the Barclay Center in New York."

"The next day was New Year's and the following day I came to work at the bank," DeStefano remembers.

He is charged with growing the bank, making it profitable, and "furthering [its] community development activity."

"We are growing, doing well. We have a well-performing portfolio," DeStefano says, noting a key part of the bank's mission is to help low- and moderate-income business owners prosper.

"In some ways, it is very much an extension of my work at City Hall," says DeStefano.

START opened in December 2010. It grew out of a contentious battle years earlier over the sale of the old New Haven Savings Bank, the city's last major mutual depositorowned community bank, to what was then NewAlliance Bank, later First Niagara and now KeyBank.

As mayor, DeStefano helped lead a protest movement against that sale. The ensuing negotiations with state

regulators led to NewAlliance agreeing to set aside tens of millions of dollars to form a not-for-profit institution committed to lending money to businesses and families in the city. That institution, First City Fund Corp., formed in 2004. It then formed START as a for-profit subsidiary.

Rolan Joni Young, who chairs the bank's board of directors, says DeStefano has opened up myriad opportunities for the bank.

"His unique name recognition,

combined with his whole range of business background, experience and expertise has been invaluable to us," says Young. "Few people, if any, know New Haven and its people like John DeStefano."

While he doesn't want to be dragged into a discussion about local, state or even national politics, DeStefano doesn't mind talking about issues other than banking.

"New Haven's biggest problem is the state of Connecticut," DeStefano says. "The overall lack of job growth and wealth creating is killing Connecticut and, therefore, that trickles down to cities like New Haven."

DeStefano cites his own two grown children, Dan and James, as people impacted by the state's economy.

"One lives in Guilford, one lives out of state, but neither work in Connecticut," he says. "There's way too many examples of that in our state."

DeStefano says one benefit of not being mayor is being able to spend more time at home both in New Haven, where he has lived for more than three decades, and at his family's new second home in Florida. He and his wife, a retired West Haven school teacher, split time between the two.

"I still love being in New Haven, I love my Judwin [Avenue] house" says DeStefano, "but I can see myself spending more time in Florida down the road, too."

DeStefano also teaches a political science course at Yale, where he enjoys bantering about issues with the students.

DeStefano did reflect, in an interview in his bank office, "on some of the good we did" during his two decades in office. He ticked off immigration reform, community policing and other "social capital" issues as high points.

One of DeStefano's biggest initiatives was a controversial plan to issue official city identification cards to residents, including undocumented immigrants.

Critics said the proposed program would encourage illegal immigration. Those who supported the idea argued that undocumented workers were already living in the city. The cards, they said, would allow undocumented immigrants to access city services and bank accounts and bring them

> under a certain degree of government supervision. The city began issuing the cards on July 24, 2007.

> DeStefano focused much of his tenure as mayor on improving education and public safety, as well as on economic development.

Notable achievements included Livable City Initiative, begun in 1996, which promoted homeownership and removed blight. In 1995, DeStefano launched a 15year, \$1.5 billion school construction program to replace or renovate every

New Haven public school.

He is widely credited for crafting a strong partnership with the city's most successful and prosperous enterprise, Yale University. He also was president of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities and president of the National League of Cities.

DeStefano once made a gubernatorial bid, defeating Dannel P. Malloy in the 2006 Democratic primary but losing the general election to Republican M. Jodi Rell.

The economic issues Connecticut faces aren't unique to here, says the former mayor.

"America has been changing in a lot of ways the past several decades," DeStefano says. "It's clear this economy is leaving a lot of people behind. For the Democratic Party to become a real force again, nationwide, it needs to be part of the communities. That's what it comes down to."

But DeStefano quickly shifts the conversation back to less weighty issues, following that thought with discussions about his upcoming weekend plans.

He's clearly a man looking ahead, not back.



Literary Landmarks

For writers and readers in the Nutmeg State, inspiration is all around.

by LORI MILLER KASE

ook-lovers in the region are likely aware that Samuel Clemens - a.k.a. Mark Twain - penned such classics as Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and The Adventures of Tom Sawyer on the top floor of a Victorian home which still stands at the corner of Farmington Avenue and Forest Street in Hartford. And that just a stone's throw away, the former home of Harriet Beecher Stowe offers visitors a glimpse into the life of the renowned author of Uncle Tom's Cabin.

But they may not know that they can retrace the footsteps of American modernist poet Wallace Stevens, following the route he traveled daily between his home in Hartford's West End and his executive job at The Hartford as he composed his verse. Or that the childhood home of author Madeleine L'Engle – as well as the real-life inspiration for the setting in her novel A Wrinkle in Time - can be found in the Litchfield Hills.

Before the colder weather strikes, Connecticut residents who tend to spend their winter leisure hours curled up inside with a book can indulge their bibliophilic tendencies by traveling along a book trail of sorts. Enjoy the fall foliage, while visiting the literary landmarks scattered across Litchfield and Hartford counties and peppering the shoreline. Ranging from famous authors' homes to the settings of classic books, these literary destinations suggest that our state served as a muse for some of the country's most beloved writers. Here, the top picks in our area:

WHERE CONNECTICUT WRITERS WROTE

The homes of several of this country's literary greats, preserved as historical landmarks and open to the public, offer guests an opportunity to peek into the lives of the creators of some of their favorite tomes:

• The Mark Twain House & Museum: After Mark Twain visited Hartford (then a publishing hub) in 1871 to meet with the publisher of his first book, The Innocents Abroad, he commented in a letter to a San Francisco newspaper, "I think this is the best built and handsomest town I have ever seen." A few years later, he built his dream house in the Nook Farm neighborhood bordering the Park River in Hartford – right next door to another literary powerhouse, Harriet Beecher Stowe. (Another notable neighbor, writer Charles Dudley Warner, would later collaborate with Twain to produce The Gilded Age.) Today, visitors can tour the restored 25-room Victorian Gothic home, including the billiard room/study where Twain sequestered himself at a desk in the corner to create the works that went on to become American literary classics. Ranked as one of the top 10 best historic homes in the world by National Geographic, the Mark Twain House & Museum gives Twain fans an intimate look into the scribe's domestic life, and also offers an array of cultural programs, including book talks and writing workshops. The library, where Clemens once made up stories for his daughters, incorporating objects now replicated on the mantel and featuring the young girls portrayed in an oil painting that still hangs on the library wall, is periodically opened to aspiring authors for three uninterrupted hours of writing in this historic setting, imbued with the spirit of this literary genius. Mark Twain House & Museum, 351 Farmington Avenue, Hartford. (marktwainhouse.org)

- The Harriet Beecher Stowe House: The 5,000-square-foot cottage-style home next door to the Mark Twain House celebrates the life and legacy of the author whose most famous work, Uncle Tom's Cabin, exposed the inhumanity of slavery and strengthened the abolitionist movement in this country. Though the 1871 house is furnished with ornate Victorian-style furniture characteristic of the period, the homey interior gives visitors an impression of the writer's artsy and down-to-earth sensibility. Several of her own paintings hang on the walls, and a sitting room off the bedroom contains a bureau, nightstand, and cane chair decorated by Stowe, herself. The house is surrounded by historic gardens featuring some of the author's favorite flowers, as well as plants that were popular in Victorian-era gardens. The "Wildflower Garden" on the side of the house, for example, reflects the author's love of wildflowers – she planted, picked and painted them – while the "Harriet Beecher Stowe Dogwood" in the backyard is thought to have been planted while Stowe lived at the Forest Street home. The Harriet Beecher Stowe Center offers many special events and programs designed to encourage civic engagement, including Salons at Stowe, community conversations on social justice issues. Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, 77 Forest Street, Hartford. (stowehousecincy.org; harrietbeecherstowecenter.org)
- The Wallace Stevens Walk: Although Stevens' former home on 118 Westerly Terrace in Hartford is privately owned, admirers of his modernist poetry can see where he composed much of his

verse - along the perambulatory commute he made from his home to his office at The Hartford. Visitors are guided along the 2.4-mile walk by 13 granite markers, each inscribed with a line from his most well known poem, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." According to Jim Finnegan, president of Friends & Enemies of Wallace Stevens (the organization that preserved Stevens' legacy by commemorating his route), Stevens would make notes in his tiny handwriting on little slips of paper he carried in his pockets as he travelled to and from work, and would have his secretary type them up at the office. Wallace Stevens Walk, begins at The Hartford, 690 Asylum Avenue, Hartford. (www.stevenspoetry.org)

• Noah Webster House: Though West Hartford native Noah Webster was a prolific writer, he is best known for the dictionary that bears his name. The famous wordsmith spent his formative years in the small historic farmhouse that still stands at 227 S. Main Street, though the 90 acres that once comprised the property have been whittled down to one. Visitors to his childhood home can learn about how the staunch patriot created the once ubiquitous Blue-Backed Speller in 1783 (still in print today), because he believed that to be an independent country, America needed to teach its children to speak, write, and spell in American – not British – English. An American Dictionary of the English Language, which took the lexicographer 26 years to complete, contained more than 65,000 words and their definitions, and further helped to standardize American spelling. "He gave writers the tools to write their great works," says Jennifer DiCola Matos, executive director of the Noah Webster House. In addition to celebrating Webster's accomplishments,





the Noah Webster House also celebrates the written word and the spoken word through poetry nights, book talks and author events. Noah Webster House, 227 South Main Street, West *Hartford.* (noahwebsterhouse.org)

- Monte Cristo Cottage: The boyhood summer home of playwright Eugene O'Neill, this New London cottage overlooking the Long Island Sound was named in honor of his father, actor James O'Neill, who played the lead role in both the stage and film adaptations of The Count of Monte Cristo. America's only Nobel Prize-winning playwright, Eugene O'Neill set two of his most famous works – Long Day's Journey into Night and Ah, Wilderness! at the cottage. Visitors to this national historic landmark, which is operated by the nearby Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford, can gain insight into the playwright's life and work. Monte Cristo Cottage, 325 Pequot Avenue, New London. (theoneill.org/mcc)
- Gillette Castle: Built from Connecticut stone atop one of a series of hills known as the Seven Sisters, this majestic, modern-day castle overlooking the Connecticut River in East Haddam was once home to William Gillette, the American actor, playwright and director who brought Sherlock Holmes to life on stage and screen. Another product of Nook Farm, Gillette was cast in his first speaking role by his neighbor Mark Twain, in a theatrical adaptation of The Gilded Age, but soared to stardom and made his fortune playing Holmes, first in the play he adapted from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, and later in the film, which he also wrote. Mystery lovers will especially admire this 24-room mansion, once referred to as "Gillette's Folly," which is filled with secret doors, puzzle locks, and hidden mirrors, and features many other eccentricities, including built-in couches, light switches carved from wood, a table that moves on tracks, and 47 distinctly-styled doors. Like the plays and screenplays Gillette penned, the castle exemplifies quality craftsmanship. Gillette Castle State Park, 67 River Road, East Haddam. (stateparks.com/gillette_castle.html)
- Crosswicks Cottage: Award-winning children's book author Madeleine L'Engle, who received the Newbery Medal for her science fantasy novel A Wrinkle in Time in 1963, owned this colonial farmhouse on West Street in Goshen from 1952 until her death in 2007. It is here, according to her granddaughter Lena Roy, that L'Engle "disappeared to her 'ivory tower' above the garage to write – and it is this setting that inspired many of the fictional places in L'Engle's books. Like Crosswicks Cottage, the Murrys' house in A Wrinkle in Time is 200 years old. Both homes have a "star-watching rock" in the backyard, as does the Austins' farmhouse in L'Engle's Austin Family Chronicles (a series that includes the 1960 book Meet the Austins). "Hawk Mountain" near the Austins' house is a fictionalized version of Mohawk Mountain in Cornwall. The windows in L'Engle's bedroom at Crosswicks Cottage looks out onto the Litchfield Hills, the real-life version of the "worn-down mountains" that can be seen beyond the Murrys' property in The Time Quintet (of which A Wrinkle in Time is a part). Crosswicks Cottage, 93 West Street, Goshen. (cwhf.org/educational-resources/historic*sites/madeleine-lengles-residence-crosswicks-cottage*)

REAL-LIFE INSPIRATIONS

Madeline L'Engle is not the only author to find inspiration in Connecticut places. The fictional town of "Cranbury" in awardwinning children's author Eleanor Estes' classic book The Moffats is based on her life in West Haven. Other literary destinations throughout the state suggest that many writers draw on their physical surroundings – or have actual locales in mind – when they create the fictional worlds that capture their readers:

- The Witch of Blackbird Pond: The historic Buttolph-Williams House on Broad Street in Wethersfield, with its romantic interiors and colonial - and somewhat medievallooking - architecture, inspired the setting for local author Elizabeth George Speare's classic young adult novel, The Witch of Blackbird Pond. Not only does Kit, the book's protagonist, live in the fictionalized version of this Connecticut landmark, but other places in the novel can also be traced to real-life settings in Wethersfield. Wethersfield Cove is the real Blackbird Pond; Great Meadows, the only place Kit really feels at home in Wethersfield, is a stretch of land along the west side of the Connecticut River; and the Congregational Church in which Kit stood accused of witchcraft is based on the First Church of Christ on Main Street. Buttolph-Williams House, 249 Broad Street, Wethersfield. (webb-deane-stevens.org/historic-housesbarns/buttolph-williams-house/)
- Arsenic and Old Lace: The unremarkable brick house at 37 Prospect Street, a quiet suburban street in Windsor, was once referred to by the Hartford Courant as a "murder factory." Here, Amy Archer-Gilligan, who ran a home for the aged in the early 1900s, systematically poisoned more than two dozen residents over a period of 10 years to make room for other paying customers - and inspired playwright Joseph Kesselring to write the play Arsenic and Old Lace, a comic retelling of Gilligan's crime story. The Amy Archer-Gilligan House, 37 Prospect Street, Windsor. (tourwindsorct.org/historic/AmyArcherGilliganH)
- The Lilac Girls: Fans of Martha Hall Kelly's Lilac Girls will be delighted to discover that the real life country home and gardens of one of the book's protagonists, New York socialite and philanthropist Caroline Ferriday, can be found in Bethlehem and is open to the public. This historic, federal-style home – and its beautiful gardens, replete with lilacs – makes an appearance toward the end of the novel. Ferriday has helped to bring Kasia, one of the so-called "rabbits" (who, like lab animals, were experimented on by the Nazis at Ravensbrück Concentration Camp) to America. The photo of the rabbits – a group of 74 Polish women for whom Ferriday raised money to help after World War II - sits on a desk in her bedroom at the Bellamy-Ferriday House, and inspired Kelly to write the historic novel. It is in these gardens that Ferriday tells Kasia that her father always liked the fact that lilacs only bloom after a harsh winter, conveying to Kasia that the horrors she and her sister have experienced are now behind them. The Bellamy-Ferriday House and Garden, 9 Main Street North, Bethlehem. (ci.bethlehem.ct.us/bellamy ferriday.htm)



Gooey Goodness

announce to my class of fifth grade students that it's time for a snack. They scamper off to their lockers to retrieve their bits of nourishment, and I step behind my desk, reach into my bag, and pull out my own.

Strawberry frosted Pop-Tarts. The snack of champions. Two fruit-filled tarts covered in white frosting and pink sprinkles. Toasted or not, Pop-Tarts are the nectar of the gods. They are so good that I cannot bring a box of them to work or I will be compelled to eat every single

When I was a kid, I would've run barefoot through broken glass for a Pop-Tart.

I step back over to my students as they are returning to their seats with their own snacks. I can't believe my eyes. No less than half a dozen of my students are peeling open small, plastic containers containing dried seaweed. Rectangularshaped slices of greenery, not unlike the shape of my Pop-Tarts, but absent all of their goodness.

No frosting. No sprinkles. Just disgusting sheets of ocean weeds.

Seaweed. My students are eating seaweed, and they are eating it by choice. This is not something foisted upon them by evil parents who are hell-bent on ruining their children's lives. These kids like seaweed. They choose seaweed. They smile as they ingest this horrendous thing pretending to be food.

And those not eating the seaweed are almost as bad. They are eating berries, nuts, granola, celery, carrots, and other

awful, unfrosted, unprocessed foods. Organic and all-natural monstrosities of nutritional excellence.

I can't believe it.

Then one of my students sees my Pop-Tart and groans. "What are you thinking, Mr. Dicks? Do you know how unhealthy those are for you?"

I love this kid, but in this moment, I hate her, too. Hate her for hating the food product that brings me so much joy. Hate her for doing what so many think is acceptable in today's world: judging my food choices.

This has been the story of my life for some time. Slowly, inexorably, the world has been shifting away from the heart-warming foods of my youth: canned vegetables; mashed potatoes in a box; preservative-laced meats; white,

nutrition-less bread; frozen dinners; and gloriously processed things of all shapes and sizes.

This was the food of my childhood. Instead, my students eat seaweed. Kale. Edamame. Bean sprouts. These things didn't even exist when I was a child. I couldn't have eaten kale if I had wanted to, and rightfully so. The world has begun to change, devolve, and with it, everyone around me has changed, too. Human beings are suddenly focused on the quality of the food instead of the amount of sugar and fat that can be packed into a single serving.

It makes no sense.

While I remain appropriately fixed and immutable, the people around me have grown nutritionally conscious and, in turn, exceedingly judgmental about my food choices. We can no longer judge people by almost any standard (nor should we), but food remains one of the last bastions of the fundamentally judgmental jerk faces.

If you're eating in a way that someone deems ill-advised or unhealthy, they will let you know and think this level of judgment is acceptable. They won't criticize the fact that I'm wearing jeans to a wedding, parking in a fire lane, or listening to Meat Loaf by choice, but if I'm eating something that they see as nutritionally questionable, they will say something.

As a result, I find myself as the only person standing up for the Egg McMuffin, Swedish Fish, Domino's pizza, Diet Coke, and canned corn.

I'm a man on an island, eating Pop-Tarts, while the world has sailed away. My students included.

There is only one time each year when the monsters I teach turn away from their kelp-based diet and come to my side of the aisle. That day is the Wednesday before Thanksgiving.

On this day, my students are encouraged to bring in a dish from home that means something to them or their family, to share with me and their classmates. Sometimes it's a food connected to the student's religion or culture. Other times, it's a family recipe.

Parents are invited to join us. It's typically a large affair. A Thanksgiving feast.

Most of the time, the dish is

nutritious, non-processed, and wholly agreeable to the judgmental heathens I teach every day. They nod in approval. Smile. Sometimes even applaud.

On this day, I wait. I allow the nuts and berries, the bacon-infused tofu, and the gluten-free chicken kebabs to pass by. I bide my time. I await my opening. Then I strike.

From the same bag that I used to transport my Pop-Tarts to school, I remove a staple of the Thanksgivings of my youth. The next best thing to turkey. Pure holiday tradition.

Canned cranberry sauce.

Many of my students have never seen canned cranberry sauce, which makes me wonder if this constitutes some form of child abuse. Those who have seen cranberry sauce in a can have often never seen it outside the can.

finger, I squeeze ever so slightly.

The subsequent sound cannot be reproduced on the page. It is a sloughing sound. A suction sound. A gloriously suspenseful, entirely unexpected sound as the cranberry sauce emerges from the can, maintaining its canular shape. It plummets to the plate, purple on white, where it bounces, lands, bounces again, and then spins two or three times before finally coming to a halt.

The children erupt into cheers. Laughter. Hands are covering mouths in disbelief. Fists pump into the air. Kids shout, "Look at it!" and "It's in the shape of the can!"

And when they taste it, they can't believe how good it is. They can't believe how the sugar-laced gelatinous version of a cranberry can taste better

My processed, canned, nutritionally questionable contribution to our Thanksgiving feast has stolen the moment. For the one and only time each year, I have found a way to get other human beings to celebrate the food that I love most.

But they see my can and all think the same thing: "Food in a can? This must be a terrible thing. The canned version of his evil, stupid Pop-Tarts."

> Even the parents groan a bit. But I have only just begun.

I place a white plate on the table. I choose white because of the contrast it will afford. I choose a full-sized plate because of the action that it will allow. Then I remove the can opener from my pocket and cut off the top of the can while all eyes watch.

I turn the can over, cut a single hole in the bottom, and return my can opener to my pocket. I hold the can, open side down, over the center of the plate, and with my thumb and index

than an actual cranberry, but it does. They admit it.

I bring three cans every year, and I always go through all three.

My processed, canned, nutritionally questionable contribution to our Thanksgiving feast has stolen the moment. For the one and only time each year, I have found a way to get other human beings to celebrate the food that I love most.

For one singular moment, I am no longer alone on my island. Instead, it is filled with children devouring the processed food of my youth and loving it just as much as I did - and still do.



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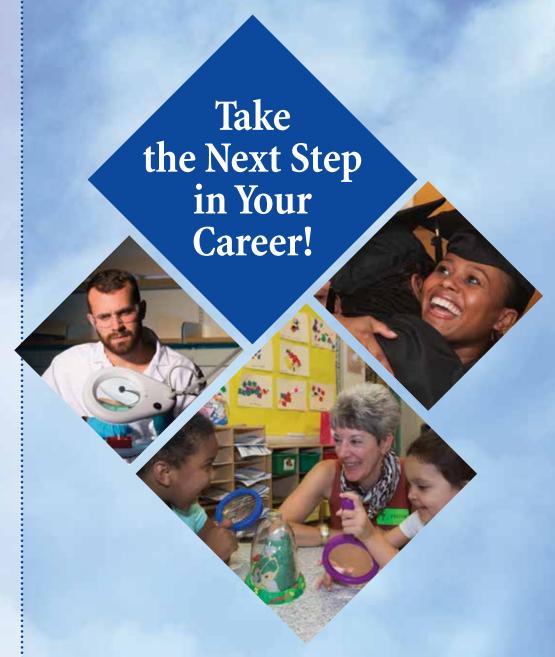
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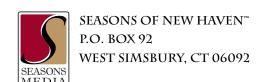
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