

# SEASONS

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AN OPEN LETTER TO OUR READERS:

# Let's Help Our Neighbors!

Whether we're hunkering down at home or courageously manning the front lines to provide essential services, all of us are navigating uncharted waters. At this challenging time, it's important to take a break from the news headlines and try to find ways to relax and recharge, whether it's pursuing a favorite indoor pastime, playing a board game with the kids, cooking together as a family, or binge-watching movies.

As always, we hope you will find in the pages of *Seasons* some interesting and beautifully illustrated stories to read, enjoy and share – stories that will, perhaps, introduce you to some fascinating people and places, and take your mind off “all things coronavirus” for a while.

In the midst of this unexpected crisis, we'd also like to encourage you to remember those who may be struggling and in need of assistance, whether it's friends and neighbors or the small business owners in our community.

While everyone is affected by the pandemic to varying degrees, local businesses – restaurants, bars, nail salons, hairstylists, toy stores, hardware stores, and more – rely on in-person foot traffic and online sales to survive, and to feed their families. Many of these businesses, owned by our neighbors and friends, don't have the cash reserves to sustain themselves indefinitely during times like these, and they may be forced to close permanently unless we do something to help them.

So what can we do?

Here are just a few ideas:

- If their doors are still open, try to “shop local” whenever you can
- If their doors are closed but they have a website, order from them online
- Order take-out from restaurants
- Buy memberships to performance or music venues
- Buy gift cards to use in the future
- Pay your stylist or aesthetician for a future haircut or mani-pedi – and include a generous tip
- Reschedule events instead of asking for a refund
- Recommend them to friends, or give them a shoutout on social media
- Hire local people to do landscaping, yard clean-ups and exterior home maintenance, or to design and plant a garden for you
- Think of other ways you can help small business owners; do you have a talent – or some extra supplies – you can share with them?
- Once stores, restaurants and service providers re-open, patronize them as often as you can

As a local business ourselves, we understand all too well what a vital role all of us play in helping local owners survive and thrive so that they can, in turn, provide us with the goods and services we value.

*Seasons Magazines* has been blessed to have been supported not only by our readers, but by the local business owners who advertise in our pages. And as we mark our 15th year, we want to express our gratitude to all of you. It is a privilege to call you neighbors.

Thank you so much for your kindness and your generosity of spirit - and for continuing to keep our communities the vibrant, caring places we are all so lucky to call home.

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**RENÉE J. BERNASCONI**  
SEABURY PRESIDENT AND CEO

## **WE'VE GOT BUY-IN** *From The Top*

Over the past 22 years, Seabury President and CEO Renée Bernasconi has been key to the success and growth of the Seabury organization. She was also instrumental in working with the state of Connecticut to get our Seabury At Home program approved. Now she's officially the youngest member of that program.

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# Seasons' Greetings



Jim Tully

2020 marks our fifteenth anniversary! It's incredible how time flies. In 2006, *Seasons* was created to be a quality magazine that is direct mailed free to the households of the Farmington Valley. Our goal was to create the highest degree of interesting articles, beautiful layouts and photography, and an advertising environment that truly mirrors our brand – in short, a “gimmick-free” publishing model. We have a belief: that we want to tell our readers stories about the interesting people and places in our beautiful state. It's that simple.

Since 2006, *Seasons* has scaled to five additional areas: West Hartford, Glastonbury, the Northwest Hills, the Connecticut Shoreline, and New Haven. In 2019, we started publishing the only glossy quarterly publication dedicated to the LGBTQ community in the state, called *Connecticut VOICE*. A lot has changed in technology and the media landscape over 15 years, and we always strive to move Seasons Media forward. We want to enhance readers' and advertisers' experience with *Seasons* and *Connecticut VOICE*, through our magazines, website, social media, and television shows. And there is more to come. To us, this is part of the fun.

Seasons Media is locally owned and operated, right here in Connecticut. We quietly support many non-profit organizations in our communities because that was a focal part of our mission since Day 1. Our incredibly talented editors, creative design team, and contributors are simply the best, and our Connecticut Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) awards – more than 60 to date – speak volumes. It is about our people and team. We work very hard and are passionate about what we do and the responsibility that goes along with *Seasons* and *Connecticut VOICE*.

I am deeply appreciative of your continued support. On behalf of everyone at Seasons Media ... THANK YOU.

*Jim*

James Tully / Publisher / Owner  
Seasons Magazines / Connecticut VOICE  
jim@seasonsmagazines.com



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SEASONS of the Farmington Valley™

# Spring 2020

“It’s spring fever. That is what the name of it is. And when you’ve got it, you want—oh, you don’t quite know what it is you do want, but it just fairly makes your heart ache, you want it so!”

— MARK TWAIN

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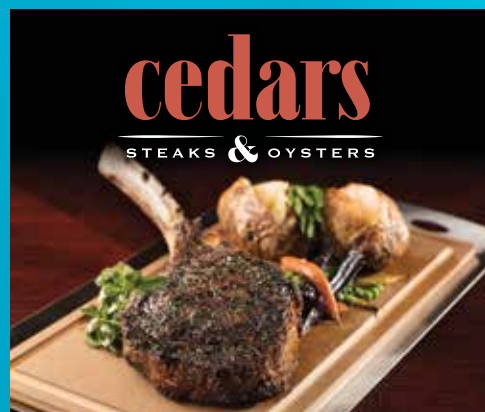
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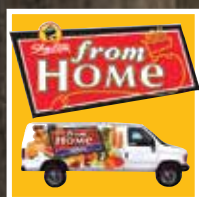
The Joseph Family invites you to explore its newly remodeled Canton Store! Inside you'll find greater variety, exciting new flavors, free dietitian services, and more, including ShopRite's low, everyday prices.

*Owners, Joseph Family Markets, left to right:  
Liz, Debbie, Chuck, Morgan, Paige, and Chuck*



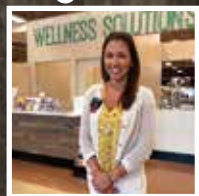
## Check out these exciting offerings:

### ShopRite from Home Online Ordering & Delivery



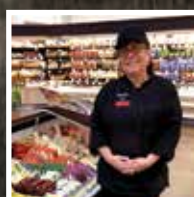
Grocery shop online 24/7, using your phone, tablet or desktop. Our trained personal shoppers hand-select your order with expertise. Pick-up at the Store, or ask for delivery to your door.

### ShopRite Wellness Center with Registered Dietitian, Shana Griffin



Our in-store dietitian provides complimentary one-on-one consultations, store tours, weight management classes, kids & adult cooking classes, and in-store product samplings. Browse our selection of wellness items curated by our expert dietitian.

### ShopRite International Cheese Shop with In-Store Fromagère, Trish Barrios



Taste one of the many new artisanal domestic and international cheeses. Our in-store fromagère is here to offer informed advice and to custom cut your order.

### ShopRite Chef-Prepared Meals



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# Seller, prepare!

A few helpful tips can help you sell your home

By MARIA ALI

A large, two-story house with a blue roof, white columns, and a 'SOLD FOR SALE' sign in the foreground. The house has a prominent front porch with white columns and a brick chimney. The sign is white with a red 'SOLD' banner and blue text. The house is surrounded by green grass and trees.

If you happen to be in the market to sell your home this year, you're in luck. Recently lowered mortgage rates are likely to trigger activity in markets that saw single-family median home prices achieve an 11-year high in 2018, and buyers tend to re-engage in the market when spring arrives.



**“One of the most important things as a seller is to create an environment that helps the buyer visualize living in your home.”**

— KATIE FRENCH

So what do you need to do to ensure your home sells?

“First impression is everything! Clean away the front door and brush away cobwebs and dirt,” says Katie French, a real estate agent at Coldwell Banker.

A buyer should see a well-groomed front lawn. There should be fresh mulch and flowerbeds. Trees and bushes should be trimmed. Adding pretty flowers in planters by the front door is also helpful.

Inside, “cleanliness is key,” says French. “Bathrooms should sparkle, and kitchen appliances should be immaculate.”

One of the most important things as a seller is to create an environment that helps the buyer visualize living in your home. Having an organized and decluttered space that is clean and orderly is paramount to achieve this. Go through every room in the house as if you were ready to move out. Get rid of items that need to go in the trash, store away seasonal clothes, accessories, knickknacks, appliances, and anything else that doesn’t get used regularly. Edit items from rooms to make everything seem minimalistic. Clean light fixtures, ovens, chandeliers, baseboards, fireplaces, windows, and any rooms that may not be cleaned often.

“Keep the decor simple. Think Pottery Barn style with clean lines. White bedding and pillows,” French advises.

If you want to take it a step further, you can paint the interior of your home in the current trend of soft grays and whites. A fresh coat of paint can bring new life to rooms, allowing them to feel more inviting. These mellow colors also help brighten up spaces, making them feel bigger.

Speaking of bright spaces, make sure to check lamps, replace bulbs, add lighting in dark corners, and open all blinds and curtains. Most buyers will be coming to your home during the daytime but on cloudy days you’ll need to have lights on in the house.

“The Internet is where most buyers start their search and the first three photos should give the best impression,” French says.

Have a professional photographer take pictures of your home. Homeowner photos taken with cell phones don’t have the same appeal that professional pictures do.



A photographer can enhance and Photoshop pictures if it’s needed.

Whether you’re listing a Tudor, Ranch, Victorian, or Dutch Colonial, hiring an experienced realtor is a key piece of the puzzle. A realtor’s ability to navigate unexpected situations could determine whether you lose or keep a buyer.

Work with your realtor to come up with a realistic price for your home. Strategically priced homes sell faster. Look at homes that have recently sold in your area and your competition. You don’t want to deter buyers by overpricing your home. If your house is on the market for a long time, it will sell for less.

When you interview agents, inquire about their marketing plans. Roughly 90% of buyers begin their searches online, and having an agent well-versed in social media channels can help your home reach a larger audience. 📱

*Maria Ali lives in Avon with her two children and husband. A freelance writer and social media manager, she enjoys writing about food, volunteering at her children’s school, and tennis.*



## Dr. Peter Wade

**H**anging in the waiting room of the Mandell Center for Multiple Sclerosis at Mount Sinai Rehabilitation Hospital in Hartford is a whimsical painting of a woman, chin up, looking forward, her hair flowing behind her. According to Peter Wade, MD, the center's medical director of neurology, the painting – commissioned for an international MS symposium held here in 2016 and aptly entitled “The Hope of Joan” – symbolizes optimism and, well, hope.



The message is a fitting one in this space: The state-of-the-art MS Center, formally known as the Joyce D. and Andrew J. Mandell Center for Comprehensive Multiple Sclerosis Care and Neuroscience Research, has indeed served as a beacon of hope for the many patients who have passed through its doors over the past decade.

The realization of a dream for Joyce and Andrew Mandell, its main benefactors, the center “allows patients ‘one-stop shopping’ for all aspects of their disease evaluation and management,” says Dr. Wade. Andy Mandell, who has MS, had travelled to multiple places for treatment and was frustrated by this piecemeal approach. “His concept was to have everything on one site,” Dr. Wade explains.

“Instead of just treating the disease, we also treat the consequences of the disease. People see that this is the right way to do it – and it’s an exciting thing that we may be changing and improving MS patient care because of this comprehensive approach.”

In addition, treatments are becoming more sophisticated, with a beneficial effect on patient outcomes. Medical therapy for MS patients is becoming increasingly targeted at specific aspects of the immune system, and clinical trials are showing that a percentage of patients are actually improving. “That wasn’t a word we used before,” he says.

### A GROWTH TRAJECTORY

The Mandell MS Center has come a long way since it opened in 2008. “We now have a 14-chair infusion center just for administering MS medications,” he says. “We started with only three.” Dr. Wade, who initially devoted one day a week to his work at the center, now works there full time, and an additional MS specialist, Mary Bailey, MD, joined the team in 2016.

The facility – which encompasses all aspects of MS care, from neurology to urology (MS can affect bladder function), mental health, physiatry, and rehabilitation – has treated more than 3,000 new patients since opening 12 years ago. “And we’ve never really advertised,” says Dr. Wade. “It’s pretty much just word of mouth among the MS community.”

But word appears to have gotten out. The center’s comprehensive approach to treating MS patients has recently sparked interest locally, nationally, and even abroad.

A sister center is now open in at Saint Mary’s Hospital in Waterbury, Connecticut, and another is slated to open at Mercy Medical Center in Springfield, Massachusetts this year. (Saint Francis, Saint Mary’s, and Mercy Medical are all members of Trinity Health Of New England.)

Meanwhile, an exciting collaboration is developing between the Mandell MS Center and the Medical School at Oxford University in England, which is in the planning stages to open its own version across the pond. An Oxford University neurologist visited the Mandell MS Center in Hartford for the 2016 symposium and became enthralled with its comprehensive care model. The center’s relationship with that venerable British academic institution began at that time and has continued to grow.

“We now have Oxford medical students coming to do a neurology rotation at Saint Francis and spending a week here at the MS center as part of that,” he says. “And our medical students from Quinnipiac are now going to Oxford University, too, which is pretty exciting.”

Joyce and Andy Mandell, along with others associated with the center, recently went to Oxford to lay the foundation for a Mandell MS Center there, according to Dr. Wade. In addition, the two institutions are collaborating on research into the association between cardiovascular risk factors and MS. “It’s kind of amazing,” says Dr. Wade.





**INSPIRATION:** Dr. Peter Wade says the painting behind him is significant to the care and hope of MS patients at Saint Francis. The painting is a collage of artwork completed by some of the residents of Ojakian Commons, a Simsbury housing designed and developed in partnership with the Connecticut chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society and Regan Development Corporation to anticipate and meet the needs of people with disabilities. Ojakian residents produced the artwork while participating in the "ARTFORMS" therapy program under the direction of Helen Thomas of the Farmington Valley Arts Center in Avon. The painting was donated to the Mandell MS Center.

## TREATING MS – AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Still, the excitement isn't limited to the center's expansion: "We're moving on to the next step with the new medications," says Dr. Wade. Instead of the traditional chemotherapy approach – which "killed everything," immunotherapy is more of a targeted therapy, specifically aimed at depleting certain cells in the immune system that are involved in the MS disease process.

In order to understand how immunotherapy works, Dr. Wade says, one must understand how the immune system goes awry in those with the disease. MS is a disabling disease of the nervous system in which the immune system attacks the protective covering of the nerves (the myelin sheath), disrupting the flow of information between the brain and the rest of the body. Immunomodulating drugs like ocrelizumab deplete the B cells, which are immune cells that are involved in the attack on the myelin.

"The B cell's job is to identify the self from the non-self," says Dr. Wade, noting that in autoimmune diseases like MS, this system fails and the immune system attacks the body's own cells. "The B cells float around your body and ask all your organs for their ID cards," he explains. "If an organ loses its ID card and is identified as foreign, the B cell goes back to the lymph node and gets the T cell mad, and the T cell and B cell go back and attack that organ. If your skin loses its ID card, it's psoriasis; if your joint loses its ID card, it's rheumatoid arthritis; and if your myelin loses its ID card, it's MS."

While ocrelizumab depletes the B cells that are making the mistakes, other drugs target the T cells, and still others target both. "We have 15 drugs now," says Dr. Wade. "Some patients respond to one, some to another. The holy grail would be patient-specific immunotherapy – if you could proactively predict which one a patient was going to respond to."

There are two main types of MS: progressive and relapsing. Those with relapsing MS, which is the more common form of the disease, alternate between remissions (periods during which they are relatively symptom free) and relapses (the sudden development of new symptoms). Progressive MS, which is more debilitating and difficult to treat, is characterized by a progressive decline in mobility. New immunotherapy drugs can slow down the decline in progressive patients, Dr. Wade says, and/or decrease the frequency of attacks in relapsing patients, thus slowing down their development of disabilities.

Meanwhile, he says, patients at the Mandell MS Center have access to a wide range of health and mental health specialists to help them to deal with the consequences of the disease. "If you are having gait difficulty, you work with PT; if you are having dexterity issues with your hands, you work with an occupational therapist; if you're having cognitive or speaking difficulty, you deal with the speech and language therapists," Dr. Wade says.

Physiatrists, too, are available to help patients with spasticity issues, using Botox injections or a medication called baclofen, a muscle relaxer and antispasmodic agent. "They can put in a pump – sort of like an insulin pump

– that allows them to deliver the medication right into the spinal fluid so you get the medication right where it's needed, using lower doses, and with fewer side-effects."

## OTHER EXCITING ADVANCES

Other exciting advances in the MS field include stem cell transplants, an even newer and more aggressive treatment approach that erases all of the body's immune cells, with the goal of developing a completely new and improved immune system. Stem cell transplants for MS are still in clinical trials, Dr. Wade says, so they aren't done at the Mandell MS Center.

But there is research being done at the center focusing on the rehabilitative side of MS treatment. Whereas initially, the research focused on robotic-assisted gait therapy, the center is currently working on defining motor deficits in the upper extremities of MS patients.

Another new topic in the MS literature is vitamin D, Dr. Wade says. "Lower vitamin D levels seem to be associated with an increased risk of having a child with MS – that's probably why MS is most common in the northern, temperate climates, because there is less sun." He says that at the Mandell MS Center, they measure everybody's vitamin D level and supplement it when necessary.

## A SAFE PLACE

Although some patients are sent to the Mandell MS Center by their physicians, the majority of patients are self-refer, or are referred by a friend. Some have already been diagnosed with MS; others come to rule it out. Symptoms to look out for, according to Dr. Wade: "new neurologic symptoms that last more than 24 hours or evolve over time, such as loss of vision in one eye, double vision, numbness from the waist down, clumsiness, weakness on one side of the body, and, rarely, cognitive issues."

MS is a chronic disease, so Dr. Wade tends to build long-term relationships with his patients. "Our retention level is very, very high," he says. Indeed, the bookshelves in his office are filled with gifts and cards that patients have given him over the years – among them a book called "Curing MS," a red crystal heart, assorted Boston Red Sox paraphernalia, and a wooden box painted with the words: Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass, it's about learning to dance in the rain.

"When patients walk through those columns at the entrance to the center, they know they are in a safe place, a place where people with MS can be themselves," says Dr. Wade, who has likened the waiting and infusion rooms in the Mandell MS Center to floating support groups. "They know that everything and anything they need is here – and that the other people they run into are going through the same thing that they are." ■

*Lori Miller Kase is a freelance writer living in Simsbury.*

*Connecticut Headshots, located in Avon, offers corporate portrait photography services to professionals in a variety of industries. Visit [connecticutheadshots.com](http://connecticutheadshots.com).*





# Important Information for the Community About **COVID-19**.

At Trinity Health Of New England, we are proud to be your trusted health care partner for life. We want to provide you with continual, timely information around COVID-19 to ensure you feel prepared and safe. Below is a list of resources available to you, as well as some updates about measures we have taken to ensure we are delivering the highest quality care to the people who need us.

- Trinity Health Of New England continues to partner with state and local authorities to monitor COVID-19 and ensure we are prepared. Our 24/7 incident command team is in place, led by Infectious Disease experts and clinicians.
- Our website, **TrinityHealthOfNE.org** provides updated information and answers to frequently asked questions.
- A **Community COVID-19 hotline**, staffed by clinicians, has been set up for our community to reach out with questions and concerns. You can reach us everyday at **1-888-786-2790** from 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.
- We have opened three drive-through mobile centers to test patients for COVID-19. The centers, located at Saint Francis Hospital, Saint Mary's Hospital and Johnson Memorial Hospital, require a physician's order and proper identification. To learn more about our mobile centers, visit our website, **TrinityHealthOfNE.org**.
- For the protection of our patients, colleagues, and the community, all Trinity Health Of New England hospitals are currently closed to visitors, with the exception of compassionate visits. Compassionate visits include our labor and delivery units, hospice care, pediatric care, and companions for outpatient surgeries and procedures. Compassionate visits are limited to one visitor per patient at a time.

Together, we will continue to serve our communities with the same caring and excellence Trinity Health Of New England is known for. Our top priority remains the safety of our patients, colleagues, and community. Thank you for trusting us during this period of uncertainty and know that we are here for you.



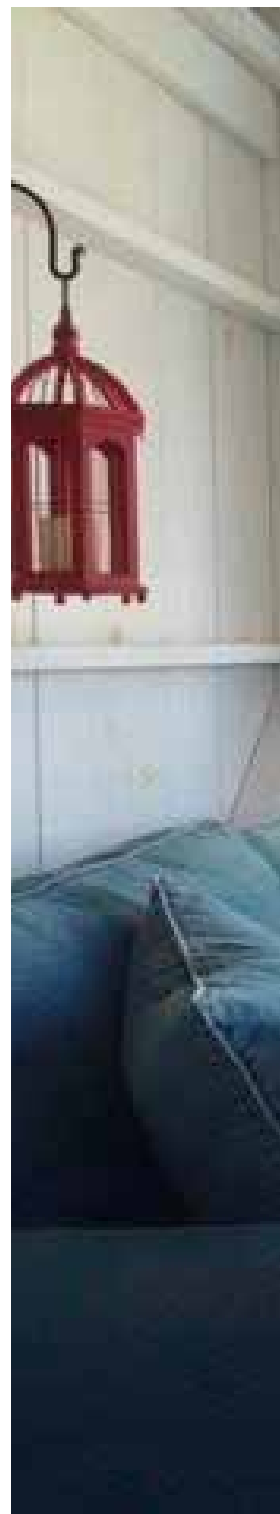
# Creating Space

Versatile she sheds enliven  
backyards and people's lives

Written by MARIA ALI



**WATER VIEWS:** Stacy Moher's she shed in Goshen is a light-filled space that offers multiple functions and a gorgeous view of the lake. Moher designed the layout, the custom cabinetry, "and everything else in there." Photo courtesy of Stacy Moher



**T**his past year saw she sheds gain popularity in mainstream culture, thanks to a memorable State Farm commercial featuring a husband and wife as they watch a shed burning in the backyard. The wife is on the phone with State Farm and is relieved to find out the 'she' shed is covered by the insurance company, informing the audience that the area is her space, not just a regular shed. Further back, in 2015, The Today Show did an entire segment on she sheds. The growing trend was attributed to women creating personal sanctuaries. Equivalent to the man cave, these mixed-use spaces are great for reading books, listening to music, crafting, and entertaining guests. Ultimately, they're providing a private space for personal autonomy.

## A ROOM WITH A VIEW

For Stacy A. Moher, owner of Seymour-based Living Interiors of Connecticut, all of those possible uses resonate. She first decided she needed a she shed about three years ago, when she realized her family was short on space for guests at her lake house, located in Goshen.

"We have a very small two-bed cottage there and we often have visitors, which is exactly what we wanted. But we found that we didn't have enough space for guests to relax or stay overnight," she says.

Moher, whose firm offers design and interior decorating services for residential and commercial spaces statewide, decided to build a base shed on an elevated portion of the yard that offered a view of the lake, and to hire someone to customize the building with extra doorways and windows – to let in more light than a typical shed would allow.





**PATRIOT GAMES:** The interior of Moher's shed was designed for maximum function, including banquette seating and a couple of ottomans that not only offer extra seating but storage for games. Photo courtesy of Stacy Moher

**"I think she sheds are being used for so many different things now. Art or craft studios, offices, entertaining spaces, retreats, or just a spot to recharge and do whatever you want."** – Darlene Risley



**SHED YOUR WORRIES:** Thomas Mach, owner of Thomas Mach Interiors, remodeled a backyard shed into what he calls "The Playhouse" six years ago. Photo courtesy of Thomas Mach

The mother of two daughters, aged 16 and 12, Moher also wanted the she shed to be a place where her girls could relax, play, and entertain friends. Today, the structure includes a sleeping loft with a ladder for access and a sofa bed. "We also have a place to sit and eat meals or play games. We have a mini fridge and coffee pot in there. It's a nice place to stay – we think of it as an upgraded camping or 'glamping' situation," she says. "It's been incredible for my two daughters; they love to hang out there and have sleepovers with their friends."

Of course, Moher also takes time in the shed just for

herself. "This is where I like to come to have a drink of coffee or a glass of wine and read magazines. I've done work out of my she shed, too, but mostly it's a peaceful, tranquil place to relax."

## CREATING A BUSINESS

"I think she sheds are being used for so many different things now," says Darlene Risley, owner of She Shed Creations in East Hampton. "Art or craft studios, offices, entertaining spaces, retreats, or just a spot to recharge and do whatever you want."



Risley has her own she shed and uses it to store vintage finds that are waiting to find a place in her she shed shop. Her husband helped transform an existing shed in the backyard by adding double doors, a deck, wood floors, shelving, and a workbench.

“About five years ago, I was telling my husband that I would like to take over most of the space for my own. I felt like I didn’t have any place in the house that was totally mine,” she says.

Her business, She Shed Creations, was decades in the making. Risley always had dreams of becoming an interior designer. She spent the majority of her career working for window treatment companies like Curtain Land and Casual Curtain but her love of textiles, patterns, thrifting, and junking continued. When it became clear that her employer of 12 years, Country Curtains, was going to close, Risley saw an opportunity to pursue her passions. “It was then that I decided that it was now or never for myself.”

At first, she refurbished and painted furniture and sold at



flea markets. As time went on, Risley realized she wanted a shop of her own, full of the unique items she spent time collecting, as well as her own creations. Today, “the shop is mostly filled with other people’s work. I sell goods from artisans made from around the USA.”

She sheds can have a variety of uses, depending on their size. Some are small and simple rest areas to enjoy a garden and potted plants. Others can house entire dinner parties.

“The trend is growing and she sheds are becoming more elaborate. I’m seeing she sheds with plumbing and kitchens. Almost like a boutique hotel room in your backyard,” Risley says.

## THE PLAYHOUSE

Thomas Mach, owner of Thomas Mach Interiors in Simsbury, has such a she shed. It’s nicknamed The Playhouse.

“I had it completely remodeled for a wedding six years ago. There’s a bar area. We have Bose surround sound and a clipper ship chandelier that took a year to find.”

The Playhouse is a Kloter Farms custom-built shed with



**ELEGANT COMFORT:** Mach’s design touches include a wood-topped blue desk with delicately turned legs, light-catching glass accents, plants and rustic lanterns. Photo courtesy of Thomas Mach





**ARTISTIC HAVEN:** Jenni Freidman's Kloter Farms she shed serves as both an art studio and a place to host former students. Photos courtesy of Jenni Freidman



double doors and windows on both sides. Electrical wires run from the main house to the shed to provide electricity. The surrounding area boasts lavish gardens.

Mach, an international color expert whose company also has offices in London, England, took on the process of decorating the shed himself. "I did the entire interior. I really wanted the colors of the gardens to be the highlight. After the wedding, it became the perfect outdoor living room space. It's away from the main house. Great place to sit and read a book, listen to music. We've had wine tastings and dinners."

"Everyone deserves to have a special retreat – a quiet corner of your home or perhaps a she shed," he says. "It should be a relaxing space, surrounded by things you love."

The room is painted in Farrow & Ball All White. The

furniture is all upcycled and painted in Chalk Paint by Annie Sloan. Mach is very familiar with both brands of high-end paints since he carries them in his showroom. The artwork is by well-known local artist Deborah Leonard of West Simsbury.

Mach lets his friends relax in The Playhouse even when he's out of town.


## A PLACE FOR ART

Jenni Freidman, a former professor at the University of Hartford's Hartford Art School, also shares her Kloter Farms she shed. The she shed functions as a studio and it's open to former students.

"I decided to buy the shed for my studio because prior to living in this house, my studio was in the basement – there was no exterior accessibility to this basement, however. I have a 1,000-pound printing press that cannot go very easily down a set of stairs!"

A friend gave Freidman the idea to fundraise for the shed. She made a special etching and sold the prints to friends





*The color scheme and decorations  
all are part of a big aesthetic  
shift in my artwork at the time.*

– Jenni Freidman

**IN THE PINK:** The unexpected and extremely fun color palette that Jenni Freidman chose for the interior of her she shed only adds to her enjoyment of the space. Photo courtesy of Jenni Freidman





FOR OUR FEATHERED FRIENDS: Sally Rothenhaus runs a thriving birdhouse business from her fabulous she shed in Old Saybrook. Photo by Tony Baciewicz



and community members. Her husband and brother-in-law added drywall, insulation, a heater and air conditioning, and electricity from the main house.

“Once the studio was set up, I hosted a thank you open studio for all the kind folks who bought a print to support buying the shed. It’s a great space!”

After 13 years of teaching, Freidman left Hartford Art School. That’s when her needs for the she shed studio changed. She needed to free up space in her studio for all the work from her school office. The transition inspired her to reconfigure it.

“So in moving stuff from the studio to the attic and from my office to the studio, I decided it would feel really good to redesign the studio, too. That is when I moved in the little couch, painted the wall and hung up the scallop trim. The color scheme and decorations all are part of a big aesthetic shift in my artwork at the time. I was right, it felt AMAZING!! After I left my teaching job, I worked in my studio quite a bit, on and off the press – experimenting with digital media as well.”

Now Freidman spends her time working for West Hartford artist Amy Genser. This has left her with less time to create her own artwork in her she shed studio. She’s happy to help her former students by letting them use the space.

“I bet as my life and work shift, so will the space. It’s nice to adjust the furniture and the decor to respond to what my needs and vision are at any given moment in time.”

## FOR THE BIRDS

Sally Rothenhaus – a long-time accountant and tax professional – also uses her storage shed as an artistic space. The shed had been used by previous owners as a depository for landscaping equipment and as a pen for small livestock. When Rothenhaus and her family moved into their Old Saybrook home, it was transformed into a classroom for homeschooling her kids, a meeting space and, as the time went on, a rec room and guest space for out-of-town fifers and drummers. (She and her kids are musicians.)

Following her divorce and as her kids began leaving for college, it became a “stuffed to the gills storage shed until about 2014 or 2015, when I said, ‘Okay, that’s it, everybody out. I need some space. I have things to do.’ So everybody came and claimed their stuff or we moved it elsewhere and I turned the shed into a creative, artistic kind of space.”

Rothenhaus runs a bird house business out of her she shed. “I’ve been a photographer for my whole life, and I knew I wanted to get back to some form of that, so I did some product photography for clients. And then after a while, I realized that I liked to make things, so I learned how to make wooden bird houses and to put my images onto metal and wrap the metal on the bird houses,” she says.

“They’ve really gained traction. I’ve done quite a lot of art shows and craft shows, primarily with the bird houses but also with other things I am making.” She also advertises through her website ([cshoresal.com](http://cshoresal.com)) as well as on Facebook, Instagram and Kuellife.com, an online community and shop for women over 50.



**COLORFUL CREATIONS:** Sally Rothenhaus shows off some of her photo-based wares. Photo by Tony Baciewicz

Her bird houses have been sold and shipped “all over the country – New England, California, Colorado, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Canada. Each one is unique,” she says. “To me, birds represent freedom of movement and spirit, and they’re just fun to watch. And the birdhouses are obviously so evocative of our homes. Just like us, some birds clean up their homes; some of them don’t. I love that. Plus, it gives me a really fun way to tell stories with my photography.”

Rothenhaus believes women should have a space of their own when possible. “I need that sometimes more than other times, but it’s nice to know when I do, I have a place to go. I can just make a cup of tea or coffee and take it out there, and have my time to think or create.”

Louis Gillen, a sales rep with The Barn Yard & Great Country Garages in Ellington, believes the demand has found a term, not the other way around. “She sheds were around long before that commercial. The name caught on,” he says. “But we’ve been selling regular sheds to women who want to have their own space for arts and crafts, reading, entertaining for a long time.”

A customized she shed can take four to six weeks to be delivered. Most women start she shed shopping in the spring so that they have the space ready to use in the early summer months. Retailers tend to see a lot of window shopping by women before they make a purchase.

“We’re in the shed business but we’re really in the ‘making people happy’ business. If women want to imagine what owning a she shed could be like ... we let them know prices and what they’re looking at. It can be a long-term goal,” says Doug Marcarelli, Connecticut business manager for Pine Creek Structures in Berlin.





**A SPACE OF HER OWN:** East Lyme artist Kameron Ghaffari of East Lyme gave his wife an old farm stand that became a she shed. After her death, he kept it as a “magical guest house.”

Not all she sheds are brand new. Some are forgotten structures on big properties that find a new life with a new identity. Others can be repurposed from something else entirely. A she shed, then, is not defined by a particular physical structure but instead by the imagination of its owner, and the goals for that personalized space.

## LOVING MEMORIES

Kameron Ghaffari, an artist in East Lyme, gave his late wife Susan Hurley an old farm stand when she sold her beloved houseboat, and had it placed in their backyard. She filled it with the artwork, knickknacks, and eclectic furnishings from the vessel, and nicknamed the she shed her ‘boat shed.’

“She lived on a houseboat for 17 years in Mystic. Everyone in the community knew her and knew that boat. When she had to sell it, I gave her the she shed as a new home for the trappings and memories of that part of her life,” Ghaffari says.

Susan Hurley was a new-age Renaissance woman — prolific as an artist, events planner, photographer and writer, among many other incredible talents. Having a space to herself was very important to her work and creativity. She also spent time entertaining her family and friends in her she shed.



**UNLOCKING THE MAGIC:** Susan Hurley's she shed has remained a favorite retreat.

It was her own space and was always there as her respite, to recharge creatively or to retreat to if Ghaffari and Hurley had conflicts.

“We’re two artists. We met on Match.com. Life with two passionate, independent, creative souls can get fiery at times, and we both needed some places we could cool down and just be. She had that shed,” Ghaffari remembers. “After she died, I kept it. It’s a place that she spent so much time in. Now it’s a magical guest house.”

Four years after Susan’s battle with brain cancer ended, Ghaffari has

been working on curating an exhibition of her artwork at Hygienic Art, a New London gallery. Some pieces from the she shed may end up in the exhibit this April.

She sheds seems to have a transformative quality. They can be a quiet place to remember someone, add to the process of self-care, exercise creativity, dabble in hobbies, entertain. They originated from old potting sheds that had enough space for women to sit. Over time, the potting shed evolved into today’s she shed. But can they be for men too? Is there a he shed out there?

Joseph Marganski from Guilford repurposed a free-standing shed he was using for kayaks and yard equipment in 2015 to make one. The idea occurred to him one summer when he saw discarded rough-sawn oak wood at work.





**IN HER HONOR:** Susan Hurley's she shed is a repository for her beloved treasures. Photos by **Todd Fairchild**



**PRECIOUS MEMORIES:** Kam Ghaffari shows off some of his late wife's favorite things. Photo by **Todd Fairchild**

He asked if he could use it. Once he was given permission, he was surprised to find that the size was perfect for the shed he already had.

Marganski bought pressure treated 4x4s at Home Depot, laid them on the ground to level out the structure, then laid down the flooring. He added windows and shutters for ventilation, made trusses, bought tinted acrylic panels for the roof to let in light, and added solar LED light inside.

"I built my Tiki Surfin' Safari man shed one summer on a whim. It's used by my friends and I to smoke cigars, drink beer, rum and bourbon, and rest and relax too. I'll sit out there in the summer and read. It's very peaceful and quiet inside."

Marganski already has something like a man cave in the attic of his house with an entertainment system and surround sound. But the man shed in the yard is a space with a different purpose.

"It's perfect on a rainy night in the summer. And when we have parties, it's a great place to hang out in, and it's always warm."

This particular man shed or he shed has a tiki theme. And it's open to everyone. Marganski told his wife, photographer Catherine Kiernan, she could use it at any time.

Regardless of who owns the she shed/he shed/man shed, there seems to be an understanding that these spaces are structures independent of the main house. The space can provide privacy and distance from distractions to focus on the activity at hand, like: hosting a wine tasting for close friends, reading the latest bestseller, smoking cigars and playing music, making artwork, or something as simple as taking a minute to look at the yard and admire it.

In a culture constantly seeking new ways of practicing self-care, for some people, this type of personal oasis has become more of a necessity than a luxury – a place to escape the frenzied pace of this ever-connected, mad, mad world, if only for an hour or two. ■



**ADVENTURE**





# FREE WHEELING

## Connecticut's Motorcycle Riders Love Living on the Edge of Adventure

By JOHN TORSIELLO

**I**t may sound cliché. Well, it does sound cliché, but for motorcyclists, it really is true that the allure of an unending road, freedom of movement, and the wind blowing through their hair (hear that, state legislators?) is what keeps them hopping onto their bikes whenever they can.

“There’s nothing like the freedom of being on a motorcycle and enjoying the sunshine, the fresh air and all the crazy times that go with riding your Harley with a group of great friends on a road trip,” says Winsted’s Joseph “Pepe” Lopez, owner of Litchfield County Landscaping.

Paul “Beemer” Stringer, a member of the Hartford chapter of the Buffalo Soldiers Motorcycle Club and retired Weaver High School principal, says a sense of freedom, an intimate relationship with a machine, the thrill of riding – and a close-knit relationship with those who share similar feelings – are his biggest motivations for riding hard on two wheels.

**ON THE ROAD AGAIN:** For many, riding a motorcycle on the open road is a frequent, much-loved adventure.





Lovey Ali of Hartford, a U.S. Army officer nurse veteran who works for the state Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services as a registered nurse, couldn't agree more. "It's relaxing," she says. "I also feel like a 'bad ass' female, in control of all that power. I like to be in control, so being a passenger isn't for me."

Ali says she is proud being the only female rider in her chapter. "I think they should give me an honorary mention because of that," she laughs. "Otherwise, I'm treated just like my brothers. Whenever a female sees me on 2s, they always give me a thumbs up. If they express the desire to ride, I encourage them and offer my assistance if needed."

According to the website "Statista," there were more than 90,000 registered motorcycles in Connecticut in 2017, and more women are gripping the throttle these days. According to the Motorcycle Industry Council, women riders accounted for 19 percent of the total motorcycle riding population in the United States in 2018, with the median age of female riders being 38 – 10 years younger than their male counterparts. Rising numbers of riders are employed rather than retired (71 percent), married (68 percent), college graduates (24 percent), and had a median household income of \$62,500 in 2018.

For some of the thousands of Connecticut riders, the road winds a long way from home. And that's just how they like it.

It wasn't until Lopez got into his late 30s that he was able to afford a Harley. "It was the best experience of my life. I have been riding Harleys ever since. I have put on probably over 400,000 miles on the different Harley-Davidsons. I've have ridden all over the great United States and Canada, enjoying the beautiful scenery and national parks that they have to offer."



**HEAR ME ROAR:** Lovey Ali, top left, a registered nurse, feels like a "bad-ass" female when she rides. She is the only female in her bike chapter. Her bike (top and above) is not only a form of transportation but a source of inspiration.





**HEARTS OF GOLD:** During the annual Toys for Kids event, bikers ride to Hubbard Park in Meriden and bring a toy for needy children to pick up. The riders then head to the VFW in Prospect, with as many as 225 in a line led by the Connecticut State Police.

Stringer explains that his club rode to Florida this year, and in the past to Arizona, Michigan, New Mexico, and Texas.

The Hartford chapter of the Buffalo Soldiers Motorcycle Club has 30 members. “We are from a hodgepodge of professions, including former military, state policemen, city and town police officers, teachers, school administrators, nurses, etc.,” says Stringer. “We are black, white, male and female. Our youngest member is 30ish and we have members in their 70s and 80s. We joined the club because of our love of riding as well as paying tribute to the original Buffalo [African-American] soldiers of the post-Civil War era. The commitment to community involvement is also a pertinent reason as to why we joined.”

Riding to the huge Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in South Dakota is sort of like a visit to Mecca for motorcyclists. It draws thousands each year and has been held for 79 years.



The appropriately named Ryder Fitzgerald, a member of the board of directors of the Connecticut Motorcycle Riders Association (CMRA), made the trip out to The Badlands for the event. He also has ridden on his steel and chrome horse to North Carolina and places in between.

The CMRA was born out of the controversial state “helmet law” in the 1970s that was going to require motorcyclists to wear helmets. The bikers protested and

won their fight. The issue has come up since, including this year, and motorcyclists showed up in Hartford to voice their belief that helmets should be an individual option.

“We believe it should be a choice,” says Fitzgerald. “We also keep an eye on things like motorcycles-only checkpoints and raising awareness of the rights of motorcyclists on the roadways. Of course, we also educate our members (about 1,000) and other motorcyclists about the need to not drive too





**“Motorcycle riding together has helped our relationship grow with trust and time spent together.”** – TRACY DAIGLE

fast or imbibe before riding. We have an obligation to be responsible on the highways and roads.”

“There was a time,” he says, “that I didn’t drive another vehicle for two years, and that included during the winter. I can put 10,000 miles on my bike [each year], and the majority of those miles are day-to-day riding.” Fitzgerald has lived in New Milford, Stamford and New Fairfield, and recently moved over the New York border to Dover Plains.

Tim Burke of chapter 135 of the Freedom Cruisers Riding Club, headquartered in Essex, has been riding a motorcycle since he was 19. That’s 37 years ago. Quite the antithesis of the image of the lone wolf biker flaunting social contact, he says pack riding is one of the joys of motorcycling for many.

“Usually we will get between five and six people but sometimes it might be 10 people in all, including those who are passengers. Typically, we will do the long rides (up to 11 hours) on Sundays when most people are available. Someone

might say, ‘Let’s ride out to Kent Falls State Park’ and we will do that and then stop in Goshen for a meal.”

Riding as a pack, explains Burke, is not only enjoyable but also helps enhance the safety factor for bikers. “It’s much easier for motorists to notice four or five bikes together than one. We are always concerned about the safety of riders.” A key is keeping proper spacing between the bikes and usually, the most experienced rider will lead the group, with less experienced riders toward the back.

Joe and Tracy Daigle of Torrington both ride beloved Indian motorcycles, she a Springfield and he a Vintage. They ride as often as they can. Joe, who has been riding motorcycles most of his life, says he and his wife “started riding mopeds and scooters together, mainly to get my wife ready for the bigger bike. We ride as a couple and sometimes with friends we feel are up to our ride experience.” Formerly president of the Indian Motorcycles Riders Group (IMRG) in Brookfield, he and Tracy used to lead 29 IMRG members





**"One day, two red Indian motorcycles rolled up. I could not believe my eyes, and the sound, wow! ... I said I wanted one when I got older."**

— JOE DAIGLE

to various destinations, but Joe retired from that position in June after getting the club up and running.

He tells a story about when he was just a tyke and was sitting under a maple tree, watching his father and others work. "One day, two red Indian motorcycles rolled up. I could not believe my eyes, and the sound, wow! After they left, I ran to my dad and asked what those bikes were, and his reply was, 'Those were Indians, son.' I said I wanted one when I got older." His dad told

him that they didn't make the bikes anymore; production ended in the late 1950s. Joe was "heartbroken" – until one day when he and Tracy were riding, and she said she wanted to check out Indian bikes for something to do. "She knew I was following them for years to see if they would come back to life. I wound up walking out of a shop with my Vintage that day. I thanked dad in heaven."

Tracy says she rides for her mother. "She was a single mother raising myself and my older brother, and worked three jobs to keep things afloat. My brother allowed me to join in with his friends riding mini-bikes, dirt bikes and choppers, which is where my love for motorcycles started. I wanted to ride free to represent and live for my mom, who worked her life away." As for riding with her husband, she says, "Motorcycle riding together has helped our relationship grow with trust and time spent together."

The Fire and Iron Motorcycle Club Station 142, which meets in Shelton, was founded in 2014 and is an offshoot

of a club started in 1999 by central Florida firefighters who wanted to create a club offering more riding and fewer rules. The club has grown to become an international club made up of firefighters and others in the fire service and EMS, several thousand strong.

Member Harry Soucy says, "People join to foster the brotherhood of fire service and to give back to others. Each station has its own charitable causes. We ride together for thousands of miles yearly. On odd years, we have regional rallies (seven regions) where hundreds ride together, and the national rally, where thousands ride. Members ride from all over the country, and our international stations attend. I started riding over 50 years ago, when my cousin gave me a bike."

For the CMRA bikers, Santa Claus comes early, in early October. That's when the club holds its annual Toys for Kids event. Bikers ride to Hubbard Park in Meriden and bring a toy (some make cash donations) for needy children to pick up. The riders then head to the VFW in Prospect, with as many as 225 in a line led by the Connecticut State Police, with help along with way from local gendarmes. Jim Whitney and Mike Joyce serve as co-chairs of the event. The CMA also holds other rides and events to raise funds for its operations, which include lobbying for, and against, laws that affect motorcyclists in the state.


"I believe the charity and fund-raising rides have changed the image of bikers to some extent," says Whitney. "But we still get looks, mostly from older people," he adds with a chuckle. "The millennials and other younger people don't give a darn when we pass by."

The CMRA's "Toy Run," which will be held Oct. 6, will also feature live music and food and refreshments. Some individuals spend \$50 or more on an unwrapped new toy and others will send \$10. "It doesn't matter. We hold it rain or shine and we pray for sun because it makes the ride that much more enjoyable."

The Hartford chapter of the Buffalo Soldiers Motorcycle Club participates in a variety of charity rides, such as the "Children's Miracle Ride" in Southamptton, Massachusetts, the Special Olympics "Dream Ride" in Farmington, and the "Unity Ride for Sickle Cell" in Farmington. Says Stringer, "We give back to the communities through active participation and financial support. This is what we do, and we're committed to it."

Making memories. That's what Pepe Lopez considers riding on a motorcycle. "It's sharing great ride experiences and bonding and trusting the ones you ride with."

Lovey Ali puts it succinctly, calling a motorcycle "wind therapy." She adds, "Join me sometime."

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# Collaborating for Oral Health

The UConn School of Dental Medicine teaches new providers while treating and educating patients with pain, dysfunction, cancer, and more

By **CAROL LATTER** / *Photography by* **CONNECTICUT HEADSHOTS**

For most people seeking oral care, the issue involves nothing more serious than a semi-annual cleaning, a cavity, a canker sore, or crowded, chipped or crooked teeth. But for some, there's a more serious matter at play – such as chronic pain, infection, or even mouth cancer, requiring assessment and treatment by experts. The challenge lies in identifying those problems early and getting patients the care they need in a timely way.

In Connecticut, help is close at hand. For nearly 50 years, the UConn School of Dental Medicine (SDM) in Farmington has been a national and even international center of expertise. In addition to offering world-class care to patients, its faculty members conduct groundbreaking research and share their wealth of knowledge with both longtime colleagues and those new to the field.

Dr. Ellen Eisenberg, DMD, now in her forty-first year at the dental school, is an oral and maxillofacial pathologist and professor specializing in maxillofacial conditions – diseases, defects, injuries, and other pathological issues involving the mouth, teeth, jaws and face. This specialty involves diagnosing pathology at both the clinical and microscopic levels, as well as teaching students and treating patients experiencing a spectrum of oral mucosal diseases as well as cancer, dysfunction and pain. “As diagnostic specialists, we are not doing typical dental procedures,” she says.

In addition to training UConn's own dental and medical students to diagnose and treat conditions involving the mouth and surrounding structures, the school's professors provide outreach to students in local dental hygiene programs, teaching them what concerning signs to look for and bring to the dentist's attention.

Dr. Eisenberg notes, “We emphasize the who, what, where, why and how of oral cancer – how it develops, how it looks, who is more likely to get it than somebody else, and where you're likely to find it in the mouth. We help providers know what to do next if they find something suspicious.”

Dr. Easwar Natarajan, BDS, DMSc, an oral and maxillofacial pathologist and member of the team for the past 15 years, says this training gives providers the ability to thoroughly assess a patient's mouth during every dental cleaning, checkup or procedure – or during a doctor's visit for unusual oral symptoms like bleeding, swelling, sores, lumps, or white spots. Prompt diagnosis and treatment are key to better patient outcomes.

# UConn HEALTH





**PROMOTING ORAL HEALTH:** Dr. Ellen Eisenberg, Dr. Easwar Natarajan, Dr. Rajesh V. Lalla, Dr. Seema Kurup and Dr. Douglas Peterson collaborate to diagnose, treat, and prevent oral issues in their patients.

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Dentists, dentists in training, and other dental health professionals at UConn SDM – Connecticut's only school of dental medicine – see some 90,000 patient visits year at the main Farmington campus, and another 45,000 at satellite locations in West Hartford and Storrs. In addition to treating patients from across Connecticut and even beyond its borders, SDM is the state's largest provider of emergency dental care, the largest provider of services to patients with acquired and developmental disabilities, and the largest provider of dental care to underserved patients.

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"All it takes is 60 to 90 seconds of good examination of the oral soft tissues," Dr. Natarajan says. "It doesn't require a special test. It doesn't require a special technique, or a special fee, for that matter. That's something that we are all passionate about and believe really strongly, that a patient shouldn't be charged for an oral cancer screening. It should be part of every routine oral examination."

## ORAL CANCER IS ALL TOO COMMON

The American Cancer Society estimates that about 53,260 Americans will get oral cavity and oropharyngeal cancer in 2020, and about one-fifth will die from it. Oral cancer is slightly more common in men than in women. On average, people are 62 when they're diagnosed with oral cavity cancer, but younger people can also be affected. Major risk factors for oral cavity cancer include tobacco products, says Dr. Eisenberg, "but we also see cancer from time to time in patients who've never been exposed to tobacco." The biggest driver is genetic susceptibility, but science hasn't yet identified the genes responsible so it's important that everyone be screened.

Patients should not automatically suspect the worst if they notice an unexpected change in their mouth. Pain, swelling or bleeding is usually caused by something simple, like irritation from the incisors, a faulty dental restoration, a broken prosthesis, or an overly hot or abrasive food. That said, notes Dr. Douglas Peterson, DMD, PhD, FDS RCSEd, an oral medicine professor at UConn for the past 30 years, "If you have a change in your mouth and it's persisting more than a few days, you should consider being evaluated by the dentist. It doesn't mean you have cancer, but it certainly warrants follow-up. That's important."

## IDENTIFYING A PROBLEM

Many people don't realize that making regular visits to their dentist can not only help patients maintain good oral hygiene and prevent decay, but identify serious conditions that may impact their overall health, or even their life.

"A majority of the patients that we see as oral pathologists are referred in from the outside, by other dentists, dental specialists, and physicians of one sort or another, including medical specialists for a variety of problems that can present in the oral cavity that are not necessarily related to teeth and the periodontal structures. So we see a range of pathological processes, which we diagnose and, in many cases, we continue to manage or treat," Dr. Eisenberg says. A patient can also call the dental school directly.

Symptoms and findings vary. One common presentation, says Dr. Natarajan, is "a white patch, typically along the sides of the tongue, under the tongue, or on the floor of the mouth." A discoloration might also be red. There can be a change in texture, a lump, or an open sore on the tongue. A dentist may correct any abrasive surfaces in the mouth to see if that solves

the problem. "If not, they would send the patient to an oral surgeon – or there are dentists who do the biopsy themselves in the clinic and send it out to us."

Dr. Eisenberg is quick to reassure patients that mouth trauma does not cause cancer. But she notes that a patient who has already had a precancerous condition or a cancerous lesion is "at particular risk for developing another."

## TREATMENT AND RECOVERY

Patients diagnosed with cancer at UConn Health receive state-of-the-art treatment, which may include surgery, radiation and/or chemotherapy. While these treatments can be extremely effective, they can lead to other debilitating problems. That's where Dr. Peterson and colleague Dr. Rajesh V. Lalla, DDS, PhD come in, working "side by side" to provide supportive patient care.

Dr. Peterson says most oral cancer patients are older adults, and many have limited access to healthcare, so by the time they're diagnosed, the cancer is likely at a moderate to advanced stage. Such patients often require "a very physically and psychologically demanding cancer treatment." The supportive care team is tasked with ensuring the patient is in the best possible condition before that treatment begins.

Dr. Lalla explains that most patients receive high-dose radiation therapy, which can lead to significant mouth complications, both during cancer treatment and long afterwards. "If we extract a tooth in someone who has previously had head and neck radiation, the site may not heal properly and may result in osteoradionecrosis," or bone death, he says. "Before starting radiation therapy, we assess and treat their dental conditions so that we can avoid doing extractions on these patients after radiation therapy." If patients have co-existing medical conditions, these must be taken into consideration as well.

The supportive care team also does everything it can to help patients ward off adverse effects from radiation treatment – such as oral mucositis, in which patients develop severe mouth ulcerations, can't eat by mouth, and have to be fed through a stomach tube. They may require opioid pain medications and, in some cases, may need to be hospitalized. And since high-dose radiation of the head and neck affects the salivary glands, patients can end up with a permanent reduction in salivary flow, causing dry mouth. This, in turn, increases their risk for dental cavities and gum disease over time.

Dr. Peterson says that the SDM offers patients the full spectrum of care, "from cancer prevention to early diagnosis and treatment, to prevention of the sometimes devastating side effects that these patients might otherwise experience."

Because the vast majority of oral cavity cancers are caused by tobacco products, with damage accumulating over time, SDM faculty collaborate with other UConn providers, through interprofessional education, to advise their patients not to smoke – or if they do smoke, to join the UConn Cancer

In addition to urging patients not to smoke and to limit alcohol to help prevent oral cancers, SDM dentists urge parents to ensure that their children are vaccinated against human papillomavirus (HPV), a leading cause of throat cancer.





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Center's tobacco cessation program. "If people don't smoke, the odds of getting oral cavity cancer are very, very low," says Dr. Peterson. Patients should also be aware that alcohol – even mild to moderate social drinking – can increase their risk of developing cancer.

## PAIN ISSUES

Another important part of the SDM's care program involves chronic pain issues. Dr. Seema Kurup, MDS, MS, FAAOM, says her primary focus is diagnosing orofacial pain that does not necessarily stem from the teeth but instead may involve other parts of the head and neck.

"I see those cases where providers are not able to pinpoint the cause. Patients may doctor shop and eventually end up on multiple medications. Most of these patients have a poor quality of life. There's often a huge component of depression, anxiety and stress in these patients when they come in." Dr. Kurup addresses both the physical and mental aspects of pain to increase patients' wellbeing.

She says orofacial pain can have many causes, including microscopic trauma from clenching, grinding or frequent gum chewing; neuropathic or neurovascular issues; poor posture; and vehicle accidents that cause whiplash or other injuries.

Sometimes, pain in one area can "refer," or transfer, to another. For instance, someone who works for long hours hunched over a computer may end up with jaw pain, or someone with a shoulder cramp may develop chronic headaches. It's Dr. Kurup's job to find, and treat, the root cause.

Often, she says, patients suffer unknowingly from temporomandibular disorders involving this joint connecting the jaw to the skull bones. Left untreated, patients may reach a point where "they're not able to open their mouth or talk or eat."

Pain can also be related to ongoing stress or difficulty sleeping, which can intensify a patient's perception of painful symptoms. In cases where the pain is caused by metastatic cancer, Dr. Kurup will investigate and diagnose that, then refer the patient for treatment.

Treatments for noncancerous conditions may run the gamut from things like heat, ice and physical therapy to pain medication, topical ointments, Botox, laser therapy and ultrasound treatments. Meeting with a psychologist or social worker can also be tremendously helpful.

"There's a host of management options out there," says Dr. Kurup. "It's not one size fits all. It's very, very customized to the patient, depending on what their background is, how they are emotionally, whether they have other systemic complaints, all of that." She says chronic pain isn't usually due to one cause.

For people unable to visit UConn, or who are patients of other healthcare systems, Dr. Kurup regularly participates in e-consults to help chronic pain patients, and their physicians, get to the bottom of it. "You can also have the UConn dental faculty sit in on those e-consults and deliver appropriate management techniques, which is really convenient," she says.

Dr. Kurup is very excited about the proposed Connecticut Comprehensive Pain Center at UConn. "The plan is to have a place where patients can come and be evaluated by a multi-disciplinary team who all have interest in treating pain. The team will create realistic goals for function and with whatever modes we have available." The center will also address pain mitigation, helping patients affected, or potentially affected, by

the opioid crisis. "This will be a very unique, UConn-centric facility," she says.

Dr. Kurup's work is closely intertwined with that of her colleagues. Among other collaborative efforts, she directs a course for dental students on orofacial pain and is involved in the outreach to dental hygiene students. "I think it's important that I'm teaching future dentists, because they're the ones who are going to go into the community and interact with patients. And one of the things I tell my students is to just spend more time with the patients, that empathy needs to come into it, and that's what we're doing here."

## CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF CARE

The UConn School of Dental Medicine is constantly trying to raise the bar when it comes to oral diagnosis and treatment. The combined dental and medical curriculum integrates the latest science into clinical practice and provides interprofessional education in collaboration with everyone from nursing and pharmacy students to social workers and the hospital chaplain. "We do case-based teaching with the interprofessional students to really prepare them for these very complex clinical issues down the road, so the teaching is integrated in very powerful ways. We're not the only academic health center that does this in the country, but we're one of the precious few," says Dr. Peterson. "It's really a signature piece of our program here."

The school as a whole is extremely well-respected, far beyond Connecticut's borders. For the past 45 years, UConn has operated an oral pathology biopsy service, currently directed by Dr. Eisenberg, that's used by oral surgeons and other providers throughout New England and across the country. "I'd say that is a unique feather in the cap of UConn Health that sometimes flies under the radar," says Dr. Natarajan. Dr. Eisenberg and Dr. Natarajan diagnose roughly 4,000 biopsy specimens annually.

Various faculty members are also involved in research studies – many funded by the National Institutes of Health – to identify and test innovative diagnostic and treatment tools, and to research the side effects of cancer treatments.

Team members are also involved with lecturing and developing clinical practice guidelines at the national and international levels, as well as heading up and participating in a variety of respected organizations like the American Academy for Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology, the Multinational Association for Supportive Care in Cancer, the American Academy of Orofacial Pain, and the American Society of Clinical Oncology. Through their involvement, says Dr. Peterson, "the role of dental medicine in oncology management is being communicated around the world."

He says UConn's program is unique – not only for what it brings to UConn Health, but to the state and beyond.

"We're very proud of what we do," Dr. Peterson says, "but we're not alone in this. We have the strong support of our colleagues in the school, as well as the support of the interprofessional oncology team here at UConn Health." ■

*Carol Latter is Seasons Magazines editor and a freelance writer living in Simsbury.*

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# Easy Entertaining

## Ten tips and three recipes for a simple dinner party

Written by **AMY S. WHITE**  
Photographed by **ALLEGRA ANDERSON**

**T**he groundhog predicted an early spring and almost immediately, people started to creep out from their winter-long hibernations, only to have to return back inside shortly afterwards for social distancing, self-isolating, and quarantining. Some spring! Although we may be stuck indoors for the time being, we can still try to look ahead to warmer, more hope-filled days. Perhaps when all this is over, think about throwing a little dinner party for all the friends you've missed spending time with. What better way to reconnect than to open the door, invite them in, and dish over dinner? But don't let the idea of a so-called "dinner party" scare you. With these 10 helpful tips and three very uncomplicated recipes, you too can throw your friends a deceptively simple summer soirée.

**1. Invite only as many people as can fit comfortably at your table.** One table offers an intimacy that larger parties can't sustain, and you won't feel like you're catering some huge event.

**2. Set a budget** to safeguard against going overboard, making sure it includes ingredients for your menu, whatever drinks you plan to serve, and some sort of decoration for your table.

**3. Prepare familiar dishes** that don't require a lot of at-stove attention. Use ingredients you already have or are readily available. You can easily elevate humble (read: inexpensive) ingredients by adding unusual elements or

techniques, as you'll see in the recipes included here. Do as much preparation ahead of time as possible so you can mingle on the evening of.

**4. Serve wine.** It's an easy beverage – chill if needed, open, and pour. Many liquor stores have discounts on half- or full cases of wine, so buying a mixed case of red, white, and rosé ensures you meet the preferences of all your guests. Set the bottles out on a separate table or bar that includes glasses and a wine opener so guests can help themselves throughout the evening.

**5. Create a cozy tablescape.** Count your dishes, glasses and flatware so you have enough to go around. If you don't, or if you hate washing dishes, there are plenty of fancier disposables out there. Set out a vase filled with colorful flowers, conveniently purchased from the grocery store where you probably had to go anyway. Create further ambience with a variety of unscented votives that won't mess with the scent of your delicious food. And use cloth napkins. People always think that's fancy.

**6. Make a playlist of instrumental music** that sets the mood yet still allows guests to converse without competing with song lyrics or house-thumping bass. My go-to is to put a few albums by pianist George Winston on shuffle.

**7. Keep the bathroom guest-friendly** by cleaning it well, which includes hiding away your personal items, stocking it with disposable hand towels and extra toilet paper, and lighting a scented candle.

A photograph of a white platter featuring several bundles of asparagus. Each bundle consists of three asparagus spears wrapped together in a slice of prosciutto. The bundles are arranged vertically, and a dark balsamic glaze is drizzled over them and around the base. The background shows a colorful patterned cloth.

## PROSCIUTTO-WRAPPED ASPARAGUS BUNDLES WITH BALSAMIC GLAZE

**Note:** Plan to serve one or two bundles (three asparagus spears wrapped in one slice of prosciutto) for each guest.

**Easy Entertaining Tip:** Assemble these the night before and heat them up in time for dinner.

**Ingredients:**

enough asparagus for number of  
guests (see note above)  
enough slices of prosciutto for number  
of guests (see note above)  
freshly ground black pepper, to taste  
balsamic glaze

**Directions:**

1. Wrap three asparagus spears in one slice of prosciutto to create bundles. Season to taste with freshly ground black pepper.
2. Place the bundles in one layer in a cold frying pan, taking care not to overcrowd the pan.
3. Working in batches, turn the heat to high and sear the prosciutto, about two minutes per side, turning to brown all sides. (If serving immediately, arrange on a platter and drizzle with balsamic glaze at this point. If making the night before, continue with Step 4.)
4. Remove the bundles from the pan and place on a sheet pan. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight. When ready to serve, remove plastic wrap and heat in a 300F oven for 10 or 15 minutes. Arrange on a platter and drizzle with balsamic glaze to serve.





## WHAT BETTER WAY TO RECONNECT WITH FRIENDS THAN TO OPEN THE DOOR, LET THEM IN, AND DISH OVER DINNER?

**8. Put out a few snacks** so guests have something to nosh on when they first arrive and while you finish up the cooking. Bowls filled with nuts or some other snack mix, and a platter of cheese and crackers seem slightly more elegant than chips in a bowl.

**9. Serve dinner family-style.** It's much easier to deliver platters of food than to plate individual servings.

**10. Be a great host.** Keep in mind that your guests are not really at your house to be fed. They are there to spend time with you and the other guests. Remain present and don't be afraid to ask for a little help.

Now, let's turn to the food. The recipes in this three-course menu are purposefully designed not only to align with these tips but also to celebrate the spring season. Active cooking time to make all three recipes (yes, all three!) is an hour at the most, including a couple of quick steps you can do the night before.

For an appetizer, I highlight spring's trendiest vegetable by wrapping asparagus bundles in prosciutto and pan-searing them in batches ahead of time. A quick heat-up in the oven and a drizzle of balsamic glaze to add a touch of sweet to the savory is all it needs to be served.

For the main course, nothing says "welcome to my home" like roasted chicken. Inexpensive, simple, and classic. In this recipe, I add a little pizzazz to the pan by seasoning chicken portions (I prefer drumsticks and thighs) and veggies with za'atar, a tangy Middle Eastern spice blend that contains thyme, oregano, marjoram, sesame seeds, sumac (a crushed dried berry that offers a citrusy tang), and – sometimes – salt, then I roast them together in a cast-iron pan for a minimal effort, French bistro-like result. You can put the chicken into the oven as you and your guests enjoy the first course. The scent of roasting chicken will fill the air and whet everyone's appetites for more.

For a light dessert, fill some store-bought tartlet shells with ricotta cheese that you already whipped with some honey, top with a couple of mixed berries, and serve.

Entertaining doesn't have to be an anxiety-inducing chore. Follow these guidelines, and not only will your guests enjoy themselves, but I bet you will, too. 🍷

*Amy S. White is a teacher, food writer, and line cook in eastern Connecticut. While she wishes she could invite all of her readers to brunch at her place, this column will have to suffice. For more about Amy, go to [amyswhite.com](http://amyswhite.com).*

## HONEY-WHIPPED RICOTTA AND BERRY TARTLETS

**Note:** Store-bought tartlet shells (made from pastry or phyllo dough) are a great short-cut here, as the small, individual portions make a perfectly light dessert bite. Plan to serve two or three per guest.

**Easy Entertaining Tip:** Whip the ricotta and honey together the night before, but don't assemble the tartlets until you are ready to serve or they will get soggy.

Ingredients:

enough tartlet shells for number of guests (see note above), brought to room temperature  
1/2 to 1 lb. ricotta cheese (depending on number of tartlets)  
2-4 tbsp. honey (depending on amount of ricotta)  
mixed berries (fresh or frozen)

Directions:

Whip together ricotta cheese and honey in a large bowl, adding two tablespoons of honey for each half-pound of ricotta (this can be done ahead of time and kept refrigerated in an airtight container). When ready to serve, arrange tartlet shells on a large platter. Spoon ricotta mixture into tartlet shells, then top with mixed berries and serve.







## ROASTED ZA'ATAR CHICKEN AND VEGETABLES

**Note:** You can purchase za'atar at Penzey's (in West Hartford or at [penzeys.com](http://penzeys.com)) or at Tangiers International Market (in Hartford). Plan to serve one to two pieces of chicken for each guest, along with a side serving of vegetables. I find that chicken thighs and drumsticks offer the best flavor.

**Easy Entertaining Tip:** Choose vegetables that are suitable for roasting, and cook both chicken and vegetables in one large cast-iron or roasting pan for easy cooking and clean-up.

Ingredients:

enough vegetables (such as carrots, fingerling potatoes, Brussels sprouts, etc.) for number of guests

enough chicken portions for number of guests (see note above)

lemon slices

kosher salt (go easy if your za'atar blend already has salt in it)

freshly ground black pepper

za'atar seasoning

olive oil

Directions:

Arrange vegetables in a single layer in a large cast-iron or roasting pan. Position chicken portions over the vegetables and top with lemon slices, one slice overlapping two pieces of chicken. Sprinkle chicken and vegetables lightly with salt and pepper, then liberally with za'atar seasoning. Drizzle everything in the pan with olive oil. Roast at 400F for 30-45 minutes until chicken skin is golden brown, and chicken is cooked through but still tender.

Choose vegetables that are suitable for roasting, and cook both chicken and vegetables in one large cast-iron or roasting pan for easy cooking and clean-up.





# Every Blessed Town

Run 169 Towns Society members share a statewide passion

Written by CARA MCDONOUGH

**I**t's a gorgeous September morning and the Haddam Neck Fair is in full swing. Families are buying tickets for the carousel, the animals are happily grazing in the petting zoo tent, and the persistent scent of fried dough serves as a solid reminder that fairs aren't places to stick to your diet.

Over on a side road, however, a group of runners completing the event's annual 5K are getting a serious workout in. Although, on closer inspection, they look less serious and more festive. Many are wearing matching shirts in blue or pink. Some are wearing ... tutus.

At the race's finish line, adjacent to the fairgrounds, they gather around one woman. She's wearing a sparkly blue tutu and stands there, beaming, as fellow runners provide her with a gold crown, bouquet of flowers, and a plastic necklace with large numbering: 169.

That woman is Sandhya Sridhar and finishing the Haddam Neck is a culmination of a years-long goal, celebrated by a group she belongs to, called the Run 169 Towns Society. As the race wraps up, she addresses the crowd.

"Running is hard. But then you enter this group and people have the same attitude, and then it becomes an obsession. They want you to succeed," she says.

But why 169? And what's up with the tutus? The first question is easy. And we'll get to the second.

The Run 169 Towns Society was established in 2012, inspired by a Connecticut-based runner on an informal quest to run a race in every town in the state – a total of 169 – a challenge he'd been working on casually since the 1970s. The notion made the rounds in the local running circuit, and eventually

a group of friends who saw each other regularly at races decided to try it out themselves.

"We also wanted to invite others to do the same," says Adam Osmond, one of those runners and a co-founder of the group. "So the group has grown tremendously and the rest is history."

The group – originally dubbed, and still sometimes called "DEBTiConn," for, "Do Every Blessed Town in Connecticut" – currently includes 3,455 registered members from across the state. As for completing the 169-towns goal, there are 109 who've done it – plus one dog (we'll get to her, too).

The rules are fairly simple. To complete a town, participants must run an "official" race, meaning an outdoor event, no less than one mile in distance and usually publicized. And completing all 169 has no time limit; it may take a lifetime.

That's good news, because not every town hosts a 5K or any other distance race annually. Take Sherman, for instance, on the far western border of the state, or Canterbury, 100 miles to the east. These and other towns are referred to by the 169ers (as they call themselves) as

"elusives" for their lack of regular race activity. In fact, in some instances the group has taken organizing races in these towns upon themselves, to ensure a member can check it off their list and reach their 169 goal. Because elusives are so – well – elusive, it means that when they do crop up, a lot of 169ers usually show up, and that's a lot of fun.

An online race calendar, as well as members' progress, is monitored by a team of



**JOIN US:** The Run 169 Towns Society welcomes runners of all ages and abilities from across the state.





**THE MORE, THE MERRIER:** Working towards a common goal, the runners who join Run 169 often become good friends. Anyone can join by filling out a simple form on the group's website, [debticonn.org](http://debticonn.org).

hardworking volunteers in the group, so that everyone can keep track of their numbers and be on the lookout for towns they haven't yet run with a simple visit to the Run 169 website ([debticonn.org](http://debticonn.org)).

Which brings us back to Haddam Neck (a "village" within the town of Haddam, for tallying purposes), which will always have special meaning for Sridhar as her final town. There's a celebration set up for her at picnic tables, where the 169ers in attendance are snacking, hugging and congratulating their friend. Tables are covered with cupcakes, balloons, and poster boards full of photographs, marking the roughly four years she's been running with the group.

Everyone who completes 169 races gets an on-site celebration, organized by the group's awards committee or by other enthusiastic volunteers. The runner in question usually wears a tutu to mark the occasion (yes, the men, too) and is crowned a "Queen" or "King." Parties often spill into

after-parties at local breweries or other festive locations.

Not the types to miss a chance to celebrate, runners are also lauded on their 100th race, and many who get to 169 opt to do a "round two," completing all the towns again, or at least showing up at races regularly. There are often get-togethers at a local hangout post-race, milestone or not.

Which makes sense. Because besides working towards a common goal, the runners who join Run 169 often become good friends. And many will tell you that the friendships are what it's really all about, even more than the running.

In fact, plenty of 169ers had barely run at all before joining.

Michele Ridolfi O'Neill has been in the group for almost five years, and is currently at town 168, anxiously awaiting her final race in Groton. She's an incredibly enthusiastic member of the group, serving as its "events coordinator." She works with the awards committee to celebrate 100th and 169th milestones and plan social get-togethers outside





**A SENSE OF BELONGING:** Groups of friends, both new and old, give themselves catchy monikers. Romances have also blossomed within the group.

the races, whether it's regular Monday night trail runs followed by drinks at Kinsman Brewing near Southington, a holiday party, or a charity drive.

She says the group has solidly reminded her how good it feels like to do something "just for herself," and encouraged her to take her running further, including completing multiple half-marathons.

But she didn't initially join because of some lofty athletic goal. She started jogging to keep up with her son, who – when he was little – liked to ride a toy motorized car around their cul-de-sac. From there, she joined Run 169 on the advice of a friend and did her first race just before her 40th birthday. Afterwards, the other members took a picture together and sang "Happy Birthday." It was – simply put – "such a nice feeling," she says.

She started racking up towns slowly, but then picked up the pace, in part because hanging out with fellow 169ers was so enjoyable. They loved getting to know all the towns in Connecticut, often "making a day of it," spending time at fairs – like the one in Haddam Neck – or discovering a new brunch nook.

"Now some of my best friends are 169ers," she says. "It's really expanded both my friendships and my running goals."

Osmond says that these supportive friendships are why so many of the group members have continued to challenge themselves, race after race.

"Those individuals in the group, as a whole, are very caring, supportive, and encouraging of other members, no matter how fast or slow they run. We have group members who are very speedy and win races as well as those who are happy to be the last runner to cross the finish line," he says. "The group is about acceptance."

Osmond, who has now completed several marathons, says that he could barely walk a mile without being winded before Run 169, "so the gains I made through the support of the group have been phenomenal."

These meaningful 169 moments seem to happen all the time.

One of the most emotional, according to members, was on September 23, 2016, during a race in Bethany that was developed as a tribute to 169 member Mario Hasz, who had died of brain cancer the year prior at age 66. His widow walked the final yards of the race with the overall winner, and members who had pledged to run his remaining 109 towns in Mario's honor crossed the finish line that day holding a stuffed bear signifying their friend, and marking that his journey was complete.

Another big day occurred in October 2019, when Quinn (a Labrador who belongs to 169ers Katey Baruth and her husband Rick Shoup) finished her 169th town and was hailed as the first canine "Queen" of the group. Quinn – now on town 20 of her "round two" – has raced with over 45 members. She's known as a fierce competitor (her fastest 5K was a dizzying 18:58) and is scheduled to run her first marathon this year.

Members have delivered meals when someone is sick, and "dedicated miles" to each other in running apps, a way to honor someone when times are tough. Children have joined – including O'Neill's 12-year-old son – and watched as their parents and other role models illustrate positive goal-setting, while setting their own goals. There are groups of friends of all ages and levels that give themselves catchy monikers (the "Sizzlin 60s" 169ers often meet up for a photo opp) and actual romances that have blossomed within the group.



Faster runners sometimes double back to cheer on newer runners during a race, and a runner being crowned that day will often be circled with friends as he or she crosses the finish line. Heather Park and her husband, Scott Grant, are active members of the group, regularly helping update race listings. They joined Run 169 after seeing the shirts at a race, and felt immediately connected, due to the group's non-judgmental, social vibe.

"Everyone is so motivating and encouraging. We are all striving for the same goal, but everyone is always willing to stop and lend you a hand both on and off the course," says Heather. "When I first joined, I was afraid I wasn't fast enough and soon learned that didn't matter in the least. It didn't matter what pace you ran or where you finished because you always knew you had friends cheering for you at the finish line."

And they have plenty of adventures outside of running, too. Nick Ricciardelli even got a group of 169ers to go skydiving with him for his birthday this year.

O'Neill says that in her role planning events, and simply as a member, she just wants the group to be as inclusive as possible, from the walkers to the 6-minute milers.

From an observer's standpoint, Run 169 is doing a stellar job in that role. The inclusivity is palpable; the positivity front and center.

"We are extremely nonjudgmental; we don't care if you run, walk, skip or jump," says Keith Hall, a 169er who attended the Haddam Neck race. "We are just here to support each other. We just love each other."

As the runners congregate that day, celebrating their friend's victory, their own journeys and the big and small details of each other's lives, it's clear that this group provides the purpose and connectivity that make life more meaningful.

That's how Sridhar sees it. Chatting happily as her tutu sparkles in the early September sun, she shares some wisdom: "I always say, if you lose faith in humanity, run a race." 🐾





# Weighing In

## Medically assisted weight loss programs offer a different approach

By JOHN TORSIELLO

**L**osing weight and living a healthy lifestyle is, of course, more difficult than it sounds. There are no magic potions, no switch we can flip inside our bodies to make it all happen overnight. Thus, many Americans struggle with being overweight and the resulting health issues.

We are bombarded by infomercials and countless magazine articles on how to lose weight fast “and keep it off.” The sad truth is that even if chic, fad diets and “meal plans” do help us lose weight initially, more than likely, those who partake of such fast fixes eventually fall off the weight-loss wagon.

The National Weight Control Registry reports that Americans try to lose weight at least four times a year, and at any given time, there are nearly 108 million people in the U.S. on weight-loss regimens. About 220,000 Americans suffer from severe obesity. Treatments like bariatric surgery, which is used to treat severe obesity, can cost anywhere between \$11,500 and \$26,000.

According to the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, by 2030, nearly 42 percent of American adults may be obese. Americans are collectively gaining weight at an alarming rate, with the average adult weighing about 15 pounds more than 20 years ago. Obesity is not a disease of willpower but a medical condition, and it is linked to severe chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure and cancer, causing about one in five deaths in the U.S. each year.

These are startling and troubling numbers, to be certain.

“If a person is able to lose weight, the tricky part, even with those who have had surgery to help them lose weight, is that they eventually put the weight back

on,” says Carla Angevine, a registered dietician at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital in Torrington and a community wellness coordinator. “Most people need a lifestyle modification to lose weight, something that will work for them forever. And it’s not just about how we look but also how we feel – emotionally, socially and even spiritually.”

### ASKING FOR HELP

Some individuals feel the need to turn to medically assisted weight loss programs for help in their battle against the bulge.

Programs offered by the Millennium Med Spa & Center for Medical Weight Loss in Rocky Hill are designed to help individuals with their specific weight loss goals, whether it’s to lose 100 pounds or those last “stubborn” five to 10 pounds, according to Dr. Maria O’Brien. It’s not surgery or diet pills. It is weight management based on medical, scientific evidence that targets the root causes of obesity and weight gain.

Dr. O’Brien says the Millennium Med process has been “especially beneficial” for those who have a body mass index of 30 or higher because it can reduce the risk of other serious medical conditions. Millennium Med patients meet weekly and directly with Dr. O’Brien.

“Millennium Med patients achieve a lifelong healthy weight because we help them engage in behaviors that promote weight loss and maintenance,” she says. With Dr. O’Brien’s expertise and counseling, patients have



**EXPERT GUIDANCE:** At the Millennium Med Spa & Center for Medical Weight Loss in Rocky Hill, patients meet directly with a physician on a weekly basis.





been able to lose significant weight and improve conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, sleep apnea and coronary artery disease. She believes her “extensive medical knowledge and empathetic, friendly approach” is the key to her patients’ healthier, fitter and more spiritually happy life.

Each visit to Millennium Med involves a metabolic analysis, a special dietary component, a one-on-one counseling component, and an exercise component. Dr. O’Brien uses a person’s metabolism and body composition as “true indicators” of weight loss progress. Behavioral counseling helps clients engage in behaviors that promote weight loss and “lifelong healthy weight maintenance.”

### NO “QUICK FIX”

Pounds Transformation, with offices in West Hartford, Southington and Glastonbury, operates on a concept that focuses on education, understanding there is no one-size-fits-all or “quick fix,” and the addressing of issues like stress, sleep, medical conditions, medications, lifestyle limitations and more, explains Chief Medical Officer Charles Cavo, DO.

“We do not rely on patients purchasing our foods, products or supplements,” he says. “We focus on having patients rely on the education we provide when they go to the grocery store, visit a restaurant, navigate a party, etc.”

Dr. Cavo, who co-founded Pounds Transformation with his wife, CEO Michelle Cavo,



Dr. Charles Cavo



**ALL FOR ONE:** Pounds Transformation staff and co-founder Michelle Cavo, PA-C stand ready to help. Photo courtesy of Pounds Transformation



**HEALTHFUL EATING 101:** Pounds Transformation has a kitchen for cooking classes and demonstrations with a professional chef.

PA-C, notes, “We are not a franchise.” The couple started Pounds Transformation in their West Hartford kitchen with “two patients and a concept. Fortunately, our patients were successful, and our practice grew.”

The Cavo’s opened a small office in West Hartford Center for managing abnormal weight gain. They quickly outgrew the space as they gained support from local clinicians who “appreciated the effects of nutritional medicine and how it translated to preventive medicine,” says Dr. Cavo. Their patients continued to have success in weight reduction, as well as resolving such chronic medical conditions as diabetes, hypertension and high blood pressure.

“Our patients receive education and an understanding that there is so much more to weight loss than the conventional thinking: ‘exercise more and eat less.’ With the education and awareness, there is a higher likelihood of achieving sustainable weight loss.” The Cavo’s say they have helped patients come off medications such as insulin, blood pressure

medications and cholesterol medications, which “may save households hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars in medication bills.”

Dr. Cavo says they have helped patients who needed to lose weight before surgery, and those struggling to start families.

Pounds Transformation has a kitchen for cooking classes and demonstrations. There’s a professional chef available and a culinary education program for clients to take advantage of. Says Dr. Cavo, “All of the providers and dietitians have specialized in obesity medicine and have other areas of interest, which improves our quality of care.”

Dr. Cavo is a diplomat of the American Board of Obesity Medicine and is boarded in OB/Gyn, which has “allowed for better management of women’s nutritional needs,” while dealing with medical conditions such as infertility, polycystic ovarian syndrome, perimenopause, and other issues – all conditions that increase the risk for abnormal weight gain. “Our registered dietitians are also specialists, not only in obesity medicine, but in fitness, diabetes, management of post-bariatric surgery and more. Our youngest patient was two years old and our oldest was 96.”

### A WEIGHT LOSS MAP

The owners of Compass Physician-Supervised Fat Loss Centers in Glastonbury believe the key to weight loss success is to first diagnose the causes of weight gain. With the help of specialized health coaches, the center’s clinicians work with clients to identify all factors in weight gain. The next step is to review the results with the client in person. Lastly, the center creates an individualized plan – a weight loss map, as it were – that makes sense for each

individual and is easy to follow.

Dr. Eric Kusher, founder and CEO of Compass Fat Loss, says developing an individualized weight loss program and close monitoring of the client’s progress are keys to a successful outcome. He explains that some 65 percent of the center’s clients are women, with the age range “all over the spectrum. It really is an epidemic in our country,” he says of weight gain and obesity. “The sad part of it is that with weight gain comes all the health risks. We want to get people back to a healthy lifestyle, get them in the right place, and weight loss will follow. We want to get people off medication.”

One of the core strengths at Compass Fat Loss is close monitoring of the patient and the encouragement of accountability in each client. “We follow patients every day through our technology, so we don’t rely on having them come back to us in a month to check their progress. A lot can





**WEIGHT-LOSS TEAMWORK:** Millennium Med Spa focuses on helping clients become healthier and happier.



**Dr. Eric Kusher, founder and CEO of Compass Fat Loss.**

happen in a month.” Conversations can be conducted “virtually” through video conferencing if the patient so desires. Compass Weight Loss has one other physician in addition to Dr. Kusher and a full staff of health coaches to make it all come together for the client.

A DNA analysis is also conducted to allow Compass Fat Loss clinicians to “fine-tune” a client’s overall plan for weight loss and maintenance, and to build a custom plan for each individual.

A medical weight loss plan from Compass Fat Loss will likely include regular exercise; an effective diet to help regulate carbohydrates, calories, and sugars, and get more protein, fiber, whole foods, probiotics, fruits, vegetables, and water into a diet; regular blood glucose tests to monitor blood sugar levels and weight-loss progress; calorie counting; intermittent fasting (this requires professional supervision); continual monitoring of a client’s health and weight-loss progress; and other aspects.

## PERSONAL SUCCESSES

Patti Roca of Tolland tried “everything” in an attempt to

lose weight. Even if she did drop pounds, the weight came back on, and more. “I had reached a point where nothing worked,” she says. So, she made an appointment at Pounds Transformation, and she is in a much better place. “I was able to lose the weight and keep it off. My knees and ankles don’t hurt anymore, I have more stamina, and by getting rid of all the sugar I was consuming, I’m thinking clearer.”

Lisa Muller of Coventry had battled weight loss since she was eight years old. She was very overweight and dealing with several troubling health issues when she also decided to also visit Pounds Transformation. “I was at my wits’ end. I was 278 pounds, I could hardly walk, and I was in and out of the hospital. I was desperate, and my physician gave me a Pounds Transformation business card and said to make the call. I knew where I wanted to go but didn’t know how to get there.” After treatment, Muller has lost considerable weight and her health has improved.

Dr. Cavo is happy when his patients succeed in their goals, and he and his staff are personally invested in outcomes and the journey.

“When the weather is nice, we have walks with the patients, registered dietitians and providers, and they target goals, such as 5-kilometer races that they run together. We have taken great pride and enjoyment in creating a supportive community that is looking at obesity through a different lens,” he says.

He says those struggling with weight and the medical and psychological conditions that go along with abnormal weight gain should not be blamed for their condition, which has been the case for so long. “It goes without saying that when we see our patients appreciate their successes, we feel satisfied that our job was well done.”



**“WE HAVE TAKEN GREAT PRIDE  
AND ENJOYMENT IN CREATING  
A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY  
THAT IS LOOKING AT OBESITY  
THROUGH A DIFFERENT LENS.”**

—Dr. Charles Cavo

Dr. Kusher couldn't agree more. "It's why I do what I do," he says of seeing a patient find success in their weight loss effort and personal happiness in their lives. "That is the joy in doing what we do."

Angevine advises people considering medically assisted weight loss programs to "do their homework," and adds, "Talk to someone who went to the facility you are

considering. Work up a pros and cons list and make sure the center you are considering will hear your needs as a person and that it isn't a one-way street treatment. There has to be give and take." And, she says, "have realistic goals – and they should be not just about weight loss but also health goals. Determine what you want out of life and then how best to get there." 📖



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# STAYING SAFE

**Bullying is a pervasive problem – but help is at hand**

By CAROL LATTER

**I**n 2011, five teenaged boys attending a West Hartford high school harassed a female student for weeks, made threats against her, and then showed up at her house. When the girl's 19-year-old cousin went outside to confront them, one of the bullies shot him in the neck.

In 2016, a seventh-grade student at a New Haven magnet school was punched and knocked unconscious during class, the culmination of five years of abuse by his classmates. His mother sued the school district and city, saying she had repeatedly notified school authorities, but nothing was done.

In 2018, an elementary student who had moved to Cheshire from New Mexico five months earlier – and was constantly bullied in her new school because she was Hispanic – committed suicide at home two days before Christmas. She was 11 years old.

These are just some of the shocking bullying cases that have taken place throughout Connecticut in the past decade. While bullying is not limited to schools or school-aged children, educational settings have been a hotbed of this type of activity for many years – and it seems to be getting worse. A poll of more than 160,000 students by nonprofit YouthTruth revealed that about 30 percent of middle-school and high school students had been bullied in school in 2017, up from 25 percent two years earlier.

According to the Tyler Clementi Foundation, bullying is “widespread in schools and on campuses across the United States” but is often underreported because the victim is afraid that telling someone will only make things worse. The New Jersey-based foundation is named for Tyler Clementi, a college freshman who killed himself by jumping off a bridge after his roommate secretly videotaped him being intimate with another male student, and then posted it on Twitter.

Some recent statistics suggest that bullying

is in a much bigger problem in other states than in Connecticut. For instance, a 2018 WalletHub report ranked our state 37th in the nation – far better than Louisiana, Arkansas and Missouri, which garnered 1st, 2nd and 3rd spots, respectively, for the highest incidence of bullying behavior in the U.S.

But many Nutmeg state parents would argue that the prevalence of bullying here is still far too high. Responding to a survey that was conducted by Patch.com and published in October 2019 as part of a multi-year reporting project, more than 330 Connecticut parents said they were extremely concerned about the severity and extent of bullying their kids had been subjected to, both in school and online. Nearly 90 percent of these parents said that one of their children had been bullied at least once, and more than 50 percent said their kids had been bullied frequently.

Moreover, parents reported that the impact had often been severe – including significantly lower

## CONNECTICUT PARENTS RESPONDING TO A PATCH.COM SURVEY SAID OF THEIR CHILDREN ...

**28%**  
HAVE BEEN  
PHYSICALLY BULLIED/  
HIT, KICKED OR  
PUNCHED

**24.7%**  
HAVE BEEN  
INTENTIONALLY  
EXCLUDED FROM  
ACTIVITIES OR  
GROUPS





grades, fear of going to school, anxiety, depression, and physical harm. Some children were forced to change schools; some teens dropped out of school altogether.

One Nutmeg state parent wrote that her daughter “cried every day, her entire school career. She went to a private [counselor] and still has no self-esteem. She was a happy little girl until the bullying began in second grade.”

Another parent wrote: “It’s had lasting effects on my son. He doesn’t trust any of his male peers, is afraid to even approach them, and he won’t participate in any social event where they may be present, which is most.”

### NOT A NEW PROBLEM

Alex Agostini can relate. Now a graduate student intern about to complete his Master’s degree in Marriage and Family Therapy and

working with Nancy Martin, LMFT at Wellness Counseling in Farmington, Agostini was bullied growing up.

“I have distinct memories from back in elementary school. I still remember the bully by name. I know why he bullied me - because he told me flat out that it was easy and fun - but it really stung. The fact that he didn’t leave me alone all the way to middle school was atrocious. I don’t think I made as big a deal out of it as some other people [who were bullied] did. I thought, ‘I need to roll with him as long as I can.’ I took a very passive role,” he says. “Knowing what I know now, I wonder what his home life was like. I didn’t think about that then.”

It’s an interesting observation. Multiple studies have shown that bullies were often bullied or mistreated in childhood themselves, encountering mistreatment by peers at school, or domestic violence and/or sibling aggression at home.

**24.4%**  
HAVE BEEN  
TEASED OR CALLED  
NAMES

**12.5%**  
HAVE BEEN BULLIED  
BY PHONE, TEXT  
OR ONLINE

**ONLY 8.3%**  
HAVE NEVER  
BEEN BULLIED

Experts also say that parents who are quick to take issue with other people, instead of teaching children to be kind and respectful, may be unintentionally modeling behavior that children will emulate. It's something to consider the next time you're tempted to yell at that driver who cut you off in traffic, or make scathing remarks to a stranger on Facebook.

As Nancy Martin notes, "When we see this type of behavior or the repercussions of it, we ask, 'Where is the bully getting the bullying behavior from?' It often starts in the family of origin."

Sometimes that's not the case, but kids see poor behavior modeled regardless. "In a wider, systemic view," says Agostino, "our culture is one where bullying is almost pervasive. People not only have to win; you also have to make sure your opponent loses. In many ways, I feel we've lost our spirit of cooperation."

## FROM COMMON OCCURRENCE TO CRISIS

Bullying has been going on for years. Many of today's parents and grandparents were bullied themselves at one point or another, or witnessed it happening in school. But things have escalated dramatically, and many kids' physical and emotional wellbeing – and even their lives – may be hanging in the balance.

For anyone tempted to dismiss bullying as a common if

unfortunate part of growing up, it's important to remember that for victims, bullying is not only painful but potentially deadly. Researchers have identified a strong correlation between bullying and suicide, and studies by Yale University show that young people who are bullied are two to nine times more likely to consider suicide than their non-bullied peers.

Marie Osmond, whose son committed suicide by jumping from the balcony of his apartment building in 2010, said in an interview that he had called her a few days beforehand and told her he was depressed and had no friends. Osmond, who was away at the time, told him she would be there on Monday, and that things were going to be okay. In an interview with Oprah eight months after his death, Osmond said, "depression doesn't wait 'til Monday." In October 2019, she revealed for the first time that her son was not only dealing with multiple other issues in his life at the time, such as his parents' divorce, but had been repeatedly targeted by three bullies. "I've got the texts – I mean they're horrendous, and ... I believe that that was a high component in him just feeling overwhelmed and that he didn't fit in," she said.

Alarming, a report released last June showed that suicide among teenagers and young adults has hit a 20-year high. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the suicide rate among

14- to 17-year-olds rose by 70 percent for Caucasian teens and 77 percent for African American teens in the 10-year span from 2006 to 2016. And numbers continue to rise, by roughly 8 to 10 percent a year.

Why the increase? Social media may have something to do with it. The advent of online social platforms now means that bullying can take place anywhere, at any time. And that means for victims, there is almost no escape. Even worse, what once was a relatively private source of embarrassment and angst now has the potential to go public – on YouTube, Facebook, or another social platform. When a humiliating video goes viral, for example, it can seem like the whole world is laughing at you.

Quite justifiably, young people often perceive that the public embarrassment heaped on them by their tormentors via social media will haunt them

## WHAT IS BULLYING AND WHY DOES IT HAPPEN?

Bullying can manifest itself in many ways, and is usually repetitive, rather than a one-time event. It might involve insults or name-calling, intimidation, humiliation, spreading rumors or lies, physical assault, sexual harassment, extortion, blackmail, theft, property destruction or a combination of these things.

Experts say that victims may be chosen because of their physical appearance, a disability, perceived socioeconomic differences, choice of hobbies or interests, sex, race or ethnicity, personality, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, grades, or lack of athletic skill. But for many victims, there is no identifiable reason at all.

Sometimes, experts say, children and teens use bullying tactics as a way to feel more powerful or important. They may do it because it directs attention away from their own self-perceived flaws, or because they think it will make them popular with their friends. It may make them feel like they are part of the "in" crowd – while the victim is kept on the "outside." Or they may simply find it an easy, if perverse, source of amusement. In some cases, the bully is jealous of the victim and wants to take them down a peg or two. Prejudice can also play a role.



for the rest of their lives. In an age where negative videos, photos and commentary can be revived and shared by virtually anyone, even years after they were initially posted, the hurt and shame can seem endless.

Connecticut has had anti-bullying laws on the books for almost 20 years, defining what bullying specifically entails and setting out both remedies and penalties. As part of the original 2002 legislation, all school districts were required to create and implement a bullying policy, train their staff to address all of incidences of bullying, and report these incidents to the state.

Unfortunately, follow-through in identifying and effectively dealing with bullying behavior has varied greatly from one school – and school district – to another, according to published reports. In the Patch survey, many Connecticut parents said anti-bullying school policies are “poorly enforced, if they are enforced at all.” Some said the policies were inadequate, ineffective, or “a joke.”

Rather than try to get to the root of the problem, Agostini says, some well-meaning teachers or school officials may tell students who complain of being bullied that they’ll just have to learn to live with it. “Faculty may take a stance of telling a student who complains, ‘You’re too sensitive,’ or ‘It’s just part of life. If you don’t learn to deal with it, what are you going to do when you grow up?’ That may be objectively true,” he says, “but it makes victims feel they have even fewer allies to trust in the school system.”

Parents may send their kids a similar message, and school friends or acquaintances who witness bullying may be too afraid to step in, worried that they’ll become the bully’s next target. While one survey found that more than 70 percent of staff had seen bullying at school, and 41 percent said they saw it once a week or more, other studies show that just 1 in 10 of the victim’s peers will intervene, and only 1 in four adults will do so. “The rest – 85 percent – will do nothing.”

That can leave a child or teen feeling totally isolated, and even hopeless, says Martin.

## FINDING SOLUTIONS

Past efforts to curb school-based bullying and its devastating effects have not been very successful. The problem continues even in Connecticut, where the state’s anti-bullying law has been updated and strengthened several times, and people engaging in threatening or

intimidating behavior can be charged with either a felony or a misdemeanor, depending on the nature of the behavior and the circumstances.

Obviously, a dramatically different approach is required. But what?

The answer seems to be a proactive effort to get at the root of the problem, and to stop bullying before it starts.

In July 2019, Governor Ned Lamont signed into state law a bill that was passed unanimously by both the House and the Senate. In summary, the law – HB7215, An Act Concerning School Climates – requires boards of education to develop safe school climate policies, establish a “social and emotional learning and school climate council” in place of the existing safe school climate committee, and provide training on the prevention of, and intervention

in, discrimination against and targeted harassment of students.

The Department of Education was tasked with developing a “social and emotional learning assessment instrument” and a model safe school climate policy, and schools will have to assess their school climate and ensure they provide a safe environment for students.

Unlike the state’s previous legislation, which described bullying actions as behavior “repeated over time,” this law also includes severe single acts of aggression. Rep. Liz Linehan (D-Cheshire), who advocated for the new law, recounted how a group of high school girls once broke into her parents’ home and went from room to room, looking for her, while she hid in a closet. “They wanted to drag me out and beat me up,” she said. Linehan argued in the House that bullying “can be the

smaller instances of poke, poke, poke ... consistent picking on a child” but it can also be a more serious single action that “places an individual in reasonable fear of physical or emotional harm or infringes on the rights or opportunities of an individual at school.”

A new school climate collaborative, meanwhile, will identify evidence-based best practices to deal with bullying and conduct a state-wide survey of schools every two years – with input not only from school officials and teachers but parents and mental health professionals.

Connecticut’s revised approach seems to be in line with recommendations from two leading experts on the topic of bullying prevention. Writing for the American Psychological Association (APA), Dr. Dewey G. Cornell and Dr. Susan P. Limber, both psychologists and professors, said that students

**The Department of Education was tasked with developing a “social and emotional learning assessment instrument” and a model safe school climate policy, and schools will have to assess their school climate and ensure they provide a safe environment for students.**

## SIGNS OF SUICIDAL RISK

Experts say that parents need to be aware of signs that may indicate that their child is at risk for suicide. Signs may include:

- Talking or writing about wanting to hurt or kill themselves
- Indirect verbal indications, like, “I wish I could disappear”
- Trying to gain access to pills, guns, knives or other ways to end their lives
- Saying they have no reason to live or purpose in life
- Showing anxiety or hopelessness
- Insomnia or sleeping excessively
- Withdrawal from family or friends
- Giving away possessions

and parents should be educated about bullying, and should be given access to anonymous reporting methods to make it easier to get help. (Several school districts in Connecticut, including West Hartford and Glastonbury, already encourage students to report bullying anonymously, using phone apps dedicated to that purpose.)

Drs. Cornell and Limber also say that when bullying does happen, schools should conduct “a prompt and thorough investigation,” and intervene immediately to protect the victim from additional bullying or retaliation. Parents of both the victim and bully – and the police, if appropriate – should be notified. Schools should mete out “graduated consequences” for bullying, and offer academic support and mental health referrals for both victims and bullies, they say, noting that these policies have been proven effective in improving school culture.

Also showing a lot of promise is an innovative national campaign launched by the Tyler Clemente Foundation. Dubbed #Day1, the campaign seeks to turn “bystanders” into “Upstanders” who promise to identify and intervene in bullying on the first day they witness it. (One study showed that when bystanders intervene, bullying stops within 10 seconds, 57 percent of the time.)

So far, hundreds of private and public schools, teams, colleges, organizations, workplaces, and individuals across the country – almost 700,000 people so far – have taken the #Day1 pledge. Teachers, parents and students can help by encouraging everyone to get involved, says Tyler’s mom and the foundation’s co-founder, Jane Clemente.

Meanwhile, in Connecticut, award-winning songwriter and producer Jill Nesi has teamed up with Christopher Zullo of the Spotlight Stage Company to produce an anti-bullying musical “showcase” that has been on a tour of the state’s middle schools. They hope to license this play to every middle school in the state and, eventually, the country, with

local children performing in their own schools. A longer, more complex version that is geared to teens and adults, called “Stand Up: The Musical,” will have its world debut in October, in North Haven. Parents can take their teenagers to see the musical, or PTO members can help school administrators bring the showcase version to their own middle school. (For related story, see page 62.)

## GETTING AHEAD OF THE CURVE

There are also things that parents can do at home to ensure their own kids aren’t being bullied – or *being* a bully, for that matter.

Experts recommend being proactive, instead of waiting for signs of a problem.

One of the best things parents can do is to have regular conversations with their children about how things are going at school, what they’re worried about, and if there’s anyone at school they don’t like, or don’t get along with. In addition to emphasizing the importance of treating other people well, and modeling that behavior, parents can explain to their children that bullying is a big problem, talk about the consequences, and reassure their kids that if they *are* being bullied, they are not alone. They can also explain to their children the importance of sharing any problems with trusted adults and peers who can advocate for them.

If your children or teens show signs of depression or suicidal thoughts (see box, above), get help immediately. Talk with teachers and school officials – even in confidence, if your kids beg you not to intervene. One useful place to seek assistance is an organization called STOMP Out Bullying; it offers resources for parents, teachers and young people, including a free and confidential chat line for youth who are being bullied and may be at risk of suicide as a result.

One-on-one private therapy can also be a lifesaver,



especially if reaching out to the school has not resolved the problem. “Once children establish a connection and trust level with us, we help them to feel heard and teach them to problem-solve the immediate issue,” says Martin. “We’ll ask them, ‘What have you done already? Have your parents been involved? Do you think it would be a good idea for us all to talk together?’”

She adds, “We can also give them concrete suggestions. For instance, a lot of times, bullying happens in the cafeteria. For one person, we recommended bringing their lunch down to the counselor’s office and then using the time until the next class doing something else. When kids are bullied, they don’t have to sit there and take it.”

Also, says Agostini, “We try to encourage them to play into the strengths and qualities that they have, rather than what they perceive they lack. If you can encourage them to be all that they can be, they begin to see that they are special and that they can succeed. We give the victim a sense of power and strength about what they can do by pointing out the things they excel in.”

Dr. Joelle Santiago, 29, a chiropractor in Avon, found that type of counseling extremely helpful when she was bullied – not in high school, but in college, when people who had previously been friendly began treating her poorly.

“It made me feel very nervous, uncomfortable, panicked, and unsafe. Bullying really can happen to anyone, anywhere,” she says. “One of the things that I can’t stress enough is the importance of being able to talk to someone outside of the situation. I saw a therapist, which was the best thing I could do.”

Also, rather than allow the bullies to make her feel isolated and afraid, she limited her exposure to them by

avoiding situations where they might be present and drew on her existing network of family and friends for support. “I had friends who made me feel safe and appreciated, and my mom was very, very proactive about it. She would drive to campus and take me out to lunch. Her priority was continual communication.”

Dr. Santiago also expanded her circle of supporters by explaining the situation to her teachers and by taking part in a variety of activities on campus. “The combination of having the support from friends, family and teachers, and participating in activities with new friends, was a really refreshing thing,” she recalls. “I was equipped with all the right things and people in my life to help me.” Coping with it on her own, she says, “would have been way too difficult.”

She also credits the Avon school system for raising awareness about bullying while she was a student there. This helped her to identify bullying when she saw it and realize that “maybe this isn’t about me.”

Today, she leads a happy and fulfilling life, and tries to help others whenever she can, both personally and professionally. “It really makes me feel good to give my friends advice, whatever the topic is,” she says. “I think some of my experiences have helped to shape me into a more compassionate person and given me a deeper understanding of the difficult things people can go through.”

And as someone coming from a long line of chiropractors – her grandparents, two uncles and her mother are also in the profession – “I’ve always had a huge interest in treating the entire person. Nothing feels as good as helping people. It’s rewarding and terrific.”

## CHECK OUT THESE RESOURCES:

**Connecticut Children’s:** [connecticutchildrens.org/health-library/en/parents/bullying](http://connecticutchildrens.org/health-library/en/parents/bullying)

**Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center:** [cpacinc.org/school-climate.aspx](http://cpacinc.org/school-climate.aspx)

**Cyberbullying Research Center:** [cyberbullying.org](http://cyberbullying.org)

**Megan Meier Foundation:** [meganmeierfoundation.org/resources](http://meganmeierfoundation.org/resources)

**National Bullying Prevention Center:** [pacer.org/bullying/resources/cyberbullying](http://pacer.org/bullying/resources/cyberbullying)  
[nobully.org](http://nobully.org)

**State of Connecticut:** [portal.ct.gov/SDE/Publications/Parents-Guide-to-Bullying-and-Harassment-in-Connecticut/About-the-Law](http://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Publications/Parents-Guide-to-Bullying-and-Harassment-in-Connecticut/About-the-Law)

**STOMP Out Bullying:** [stompoutbullying.org](http://stompoutbullying.org)

**STOPit Solutions:** [stopitsolutions.com/blog/a-look-at-the-year-ahead](http://stopitsolutions.com/blog/a-look-at-the-year-ahead)

**U.S. bullying prevention site:** [stopbullying.gov](http://stopbullying.gov)



# Creating A Kinder World

Connecticut-born musicals hope to wipe out bullying

By CAROL LATTER

The co-creators of a new, full-length anti-bullying musical are aiming high, hoping the evocative play will one day appear on Broadway, and that a shorter version geared to middle school students will eventually be seen in every community nationwide. But that's not their only – or even primary – objective.

Instead, Emmy-nominated singer, songwriter and producer Jill Nesi and Spotlight Stage Company co-founder and director Christopher Zullo would like to see these productions change a culture of bullying that has persisted for decades – and give peace and resolution not only to victims and their parents, but to bullies as well.

"Stand Up: The Musical," intended for adult and teenage audiences, will have its world premiere in October, at High Lane Club in North Haven. The production will feature young people from across the state who responded to casting calls earlier this year.

In the musical, a high school sophomore who is bullied by her classmates at school and on social media

is visited in her dreams by the ghost of a gay, African American teen – in scenes reminiscent of Dickens' "A Christmas Carol." The ghost, who committed suicide after being bullied himself, urges her not to give up hope. He encourages her to stand up and speak out on behalf of herself and others, and to surround herself with allies who can help put an end to the bullying. In the process, the sophomore is also able to show compassion and kindness to the perpetrator, a young girl who has been bullied and mistreated by her own mother.

A shorter version of the production, better suited to a younger audience ("Stand Up: The Bully Prevention Musical Showcase"), has already been touring middle schools across the state, to rave reviews. Both are part of an anti-bullying initiative called Stand Up and Speak Out. The mission is to raise awareness about today's global bullying epidemic "by building connection and empathy through the arts."

The whole effort got its start a few years ago, after Nesi's seventh-grade daughter told her mom that she was being bullied in school. Nesi – who had been writing and performing inspirational music to benefit nonprofits, families and children – not only intervened in that situation but wrote a song about it. She

shared that song in a meeting with State Rep. Noreen Kokoruda (R-Madison), a panel of school superintendents, and state Commission on Women, Children and Seniors executive director Steven Hernández, in the hope of bringing attention to this important issue. Their reaction was enthusiastic. "And from that song came 14 other songs," she says.

Nesi got help on several of them from Guilford musician Nick Fradiani, Sr. The result was a musical called "Her Song," which debuted at the Ivoryton Playhouse in May 2017, and was funded entirely by Nesi. "We had seven shows there. Four were school shows – there were probably over 1,000 kids – and then three public shows, which all sold out," she recalls.

Three years and several rewrites later, the production has morphed into the current 30-minute musical showcase that has been touring middle schools as well as the full-blown version geared to an older audience – thanks in large part to Zullo, who was brought in last year as the director and ended up rewriting the show, with plenty of input from Nesi.

"It's been an amazing collaboration," says Zullo. "I never considered myself a writer." The subject matter speaks to him. He is gay and was bullied in school as well.

He says the response to the shorter



school-oriented showcase has been amazing, with everyone from students to parents to politicians loving every minute of it. He notes that audiences have been moved by the messages of compassion, empowerment and hope in the productions, and the student actors – whether they’ve been bullied themselves or not – have gotten a fresh outlook on the topic.

Nesi couldn’t agree more. “For the people who have viewed this, or been part of this, I see a change. And that alone is just amazing,” she says. “There’s one girl who tried out for the play and she was painfully shy – she could not even talk – so we gave her a main part in one of the songs where she is a dancer. Now when she comes to rehearsal, she’s a different kid. I’ve never seen anything like it. She used to wear her hair back and her shoulders were hunched, and she would just hide in the corner. Now, she’s dancing and hair is down. She’s flying around. It’s worth it, just to see that. Her mom came up to me after one of the public shows that we did and she said, ‘Thank you for doing this. It’s changed her life.’ And a lot of people have said that.”

Nesi says the central message of the play is clear, even to younger audience members. Rather than hide from bullies, fight back, or withdraw, “we want kids to stand up and speak out for themselves, and stand up and speak out for one another, as well. Because kids experience [and witness] bullying all the time, and they don’t say anything because they’re afraid.”

She says because the school showcase

involves high schoolers performing for middle school students, “the younger kids see ‘themselves’ on the stage, and they’re learning through music and the arts about kindness and compassion and empathy without even realizing it.”

Zullo says he and Nesi also want to illuminate this potentially devastating issue for parents and teachers. “For some reason, bullied kids often don’t think that they can tell anyone what’s going on. We want to hold up a mirror and say, ‘This could be happening right under your nose.’”

Hernández and the state Commission on Women, Children and Seniors have remained involved in supporting the program, and since the anti-bullying showcase began touring Connecticut, Nesi and her group have performed songs from the shows at the state Capitol – and even for the United Nations in New York. “It’s really been an amazing experience for the kids and for me,” she says.

Now comes the challenge to find funding to keep the effort going, and to expand it geographically. Nesi, Zullo, and the rest of their team continue to seek partners, sponsors, grants and fund-raising opportunities to keep the dream alive.

Hernández says the Stand Up and Speak Out showcase performances have been incredibly effective at opening the hearts and minds of everyone involved, from performers to audience members, and the longer version will no doubt have a similar effect. The musicals spread a heartfelt anti-bullying message “through two different avenues – the expressive

avenue of stage craft and the expressive avenue of musical craft – and also [offer] the connective value of having adults and young people working together toward making a better environment in their schools,” he says. He adds, “We’re hoping that the state of Connecticut can lead ... the country in this work.”

The ultimate goal is to license the musicals to school drama directors and PTAs as well as community theaters across the country, so that the productions can be performed using local talent. “That’s impactful because it’s life-changing for the kids in the play, as well as for the kids who see it,” Nesi says.

When kids are bullied, she explains, “they feel belittled by other kids and it affects their self-esteem for the rest of their lives.”

For some, the impact is even more severe. “Bullying now is causing some kids to end their lives. It’s disgraceful,” Nesi says. “Children need to see that if you stand up for yourself and other people stand up for you, and you open up to adults and we speak about it – you can see what your life can become rather than thinking, ‘Oh my God, this is the worst thing that’s ever happened to me. I don’t want to be here anymore.’ And that’s what the play tagline that Chris Zullo created is about, and what we want kids to understand: ‘No one is too broken to be fixed.’”

For more information, visit [www.facebook.com/StandUpandSpeakOutMusical](https://www.facebook.com/StandUpandSpeakOutMusical) and [standupspeakoutct.com](http://standupspeakoutct.com) 📺



Production team, from left: Sandy Mascia (company manager), Jill Nesi (creator/ music and lyrics), and Christopher Zullo (director and writer)

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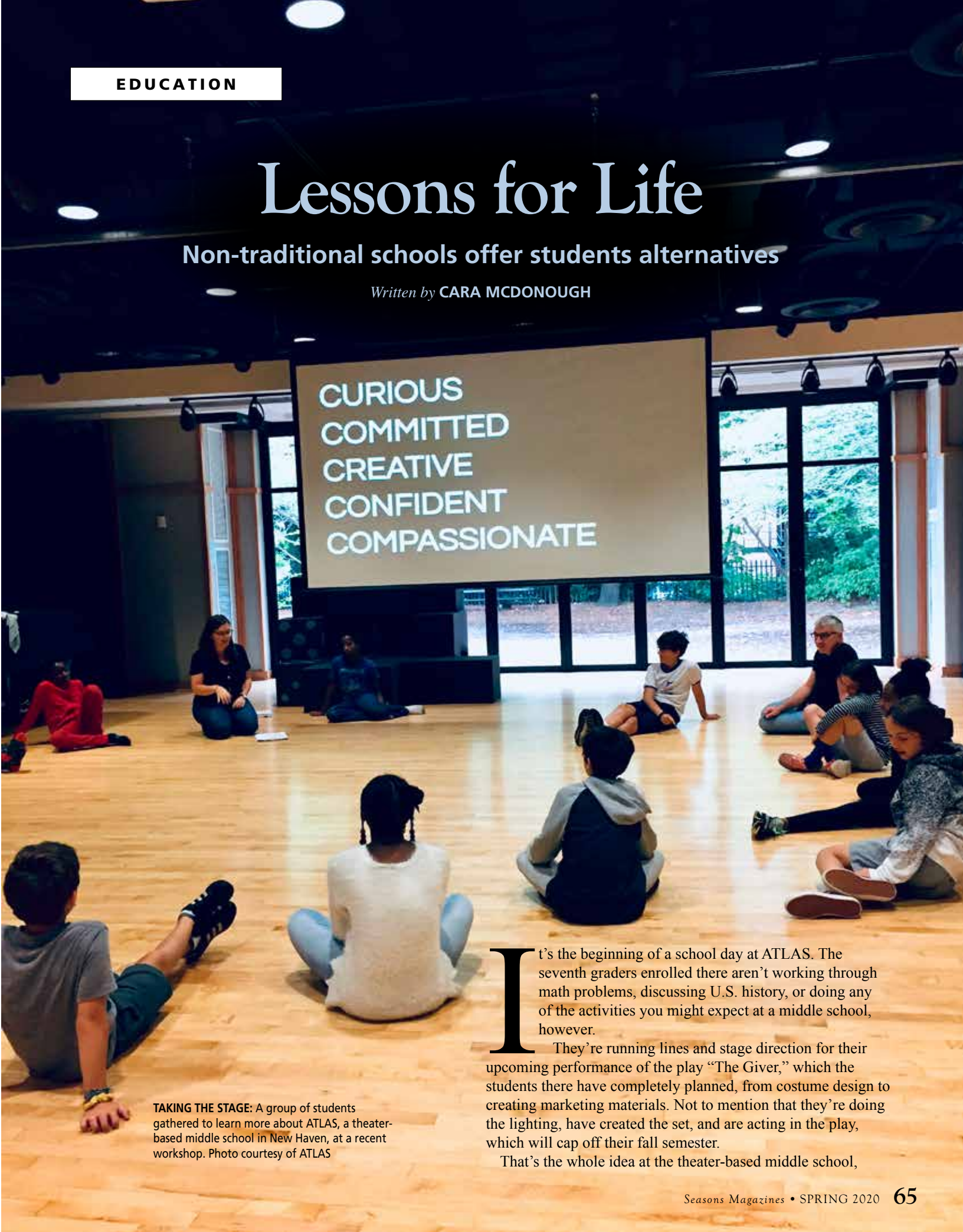
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# Lessons for Life

Non-traditional schools offer students alternatives

Written by CARA MCDONOUGH



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**TAKING THE STAGE:** A group of students gathered to learn more about ATLAS, a theater-based middle school in New Haven, at a recent workshop. Photo courtesy of ATLAS

It's the beginning of a school day at ATLAS. The seventh graders enrolled there aren't working through math problems, discussing U.S. history, or doing any of the activities you might expect at a middle school, however.

They're running lines and stage direction for their upcoming performance of the play "The Giver," which the students there have completely planned, from costume design to creating marketing materials. Not to mention that they're doing the lighting, have created the set, and are acting in the play, which will cap off their fall semester.

That's the whole idea at the theater-based middle school,



which opened in 2019 with a class of seventh graders and will be expanding to include eighth graders next year. ATLAS – which is located at Neighborhood Music School, a non-profit arts school in New Haven – is an alternative school where students learn through running a theater company.

It's one of many alternative schools in the state that provide a unique educational landscape for families and students who want – or need – something other than the norm. From private schools (like ATLAS) to charters, magnet schools, and alternative schools within the public system, these educational institutions provide a huge range of educational methodologies.

These schools exist all over the state, and the New

Haven area alone is home to many, including newer schools, like ATLAS, as well as established alternative schools like Common Ground, the nation's longest-running environmental charter school, opened in 1997. The high school emphasizes environmental stewardship in its curriculum, and the campus includes an onsite urban farm, giving students real-life lessons about sustainable living and the opportunity to contribute to New Haven's food system. The school also runs a host of programs for families focused on connecting visitors to the natural world.

As with other alternative schools, the curriculum at ATLAS might seem like completely unfamiliar territory, at least at first. But learning through theater is a dream come true for some students looking for a completely different middle school experience.

A typical day at the school, which begins with “movement and meditation,” clearly indicates the creative ways ATLAS staff incorporate lessons into the theater theme. STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) learning is infused into all aspects of stagecraft, such as costume design, which students complete at a station in one of their classrooms, complete with spare material and measuring tools. Students learn humanities lessons by comparing aspects of their play with connections to current events, and recognize individual intellectual specialties through an “objectives” course, pursuing self-directed projects like photography or choreography.

“I feel like in any school in the first year, the number one goal is building a culture,” says Founding Artistic Director Maria Bartz. “The students here have really co-created that.”

Bartz created the concept for the school with Founding Education Director Caroline Golschneider, and staff also includes Billy O'Shea, the STEM director, as well as a roster of specialty instructors.

The result of students collaborating to reach such a specific educational goal has resulted in a cohort of inspired and inspiring students, unusually connected to their shared ideals and to one other.

“We're all different, but we are all like a big family,” says student Giada, who declined to give her last name.

**CITY-BOUND:** Part of the ATLAS curriculum involves venturing into New Haven for field trips in order to learn from, and contribute to, the community. Photo courtesy of ATLAS





## CALL OF THE WILD

At Slate School in North Haven, a nature-based elementary school that opened in the fall of 2018, large sliding doors and windows look onto a pristine courtyard, central to the bucolic 25-acre campus. The setup is meant to provide students a seamless transition from inside to out, allowing children to explore many different workspaces at the school and roam the campus regularly, investigating wildlife, native plants, and the changing seasons.

The school itself is a natural wonder, crafted from environmentally friendly materials, such as sustainably forested wood, with circadian rhythm lighting that mimics the natural light of the sun and changes throughout the day.

"This is a powerful space," says Julie Mountcastle, head of school and a second-grade teacher from the Grove, one of the bright, airy school buildings where student art projects dot the walls. All of the classroom buildings, such as Apple Tree and Wildflower, have nature-inspired monikers.

The Slate School, created by couple Jennifer Staple Clark and Alexander Clark, emphasizes student-led projects,



**BACK TO NATURE:** Slate School is one of the only nature-based elementary schools in the country, and also one of a handful of nature-based, arts-integrated elementary schools. Slate School fosters each child's unique curiosity and creativity in a nurturing, academically-rigorous learning community. Photo courtesy of the Slate School



which direct the overall learning. Children choose subjects, examine texts and other learning materials, and gather "artifacts," working with teachers to fill their notebooks with "impressions, facts, and more questions," according to the school's website.

"We teach them through the lens of their curiosity," says Mountcastle of the process, which favors a hands-on approach, with students working side by side on different subjects. In one classroom, for instance, a teacher encouraged a curious student as he conducted an experiment, floating different materials in a bucket of water. Nearby, another student sat engrossed in a book about squirrels.

There are many other ways Slate School differs from a typical school structure: the faculty includes a writer-in-residence who works onsite,

**LEARNING BY DOING:** At Slate School, the curriculum does not include passive learning, memorization, standardized tests, or worksheet-based learning. Instead, children are actively engaged as critical thinkers and real learners. Photo courtesy of the Slate School





**INDIVIDUALIZED STUDY:** At Slate School, the heart of every day is its work on projects. Beginning in October, each child selects his or her first unique topic of the year. The process, spanning selection to presentation, takes place 4-6 times in a school year. Project topics among the youngest elementary school students at Slate School have ranged from Leonardo da Vinci and Italy to vegetables and bones. Photo courtesy of the Slate School

and will soon include a fully functioning greenhouse, accessible during all seasons.

But the fundamental goal is encouraging each student's individual creativity, says Jennifer Staple Clark.

"It's phenomenal seeing the children," she says. "They're just so excited about everything they're learning."

## SIDE BY SIDE

Dr. Anne Dichele is dean of the School of Education at Quinnipiac University, as well as one of the founders of the Side By Side Charter School in Norwalk, one of Connecticut's first state-funded charter schools. The school opened in 1997.

She says that she understands the desire for alternative educational outlets, and that starting new schools is certainly the prerogative of those who choose to do so. But she adds that a potential downside of the trend occurs when public education systems are neglected in the process.

"The issue is when people begin to think of schooling as a commodity, as something you can buy or choose," she says. "Whereas public education is really a civic commodity."

She is proud that the Side by Side Charter School has stayed true to its original mission over the years. The school, which has been recognized by the state for its successes, is a small, innovative institution that serves a community in need, instilling social justice ideals in its high-achieving students, she says.

According to its mission statement, Side By Side's staff members help students "build character and responsibility through a commitment to community, social justice, and tolerance towards others."

The school's downtown SONO location "enables our students and faculty to partner with surrounding art centers, museums, Long Island science studies, festival

performances, and neighboring commerce. Through challenging and enriching hands-on activities, SBS focuses on high academic standards, respect, tolerance, and success."

"Initially, charter schools were meant to be labs of innovation, says Dr. Dichele. "They were opportunities to not have to deal with red tape and give teachers more autonomy."

She fears, however, that many charter schools are becoming money-making ventures for corporations that run them. School, she says, "can't just be a commodity; it has to be a civic obligation."

## AN ALTERNATIVE PATH

Alta at the Pyne Center is an alternative high school, but it is part of the Southington Public School District. The "school of choice" serves students referred through Southington High School, who may not have been successful in a traditional setting.

Referrals come in for a variety of reasons, says Jess Levin, director of the school. Some students thrive better in a smaller school environment (Alta typically enrolls 40 to 50 students total) and some are experiencing anxiety or emotional issues.

That being said, the school aligns itself with the traditional high school's curriculum, allows its students to utilize programming at the high school and expects academic excellence from those enrolled, Levin says. But what Alta does well, through smaller class sizes and alternative programming, is to help students thrive in an environment that allows them to express themselves individually and work towards goals at their own pace.

The school's trout farm, for example, is a grant-funded program, allowing Alta students to grow trout from eggs





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**FINDING SUCCESS:** At Alta at the Pyne Center, part of the Southington Public School District, students are encouraged to think independently, problem solve and write with purpose. Photo courtesy of Alta

and release them into a nearby waterway each spring. The project gives the students a uniquely close-up look into the world of aquatic life, says Levin, but also teaches responsibility and observation skills in a real-world way.

Students also join advisory groups, made up of six or seven students each, that meet weekly to touch base and set goals. “We can be a lot more flexible here, and that’s important because a lot of our kids do come from challenging backgrounds,” Levin says. “We can work creatively, and individually, with each student.”

School counselor Mark Hill says these alternative experiences, and the close relationships school faculty are able to forge with students, can make an incredible difference.

“I literally can say that I speak to each kid every day, and that’s awesome,” he says. “Every student has at least one staff member they are really close with.”



Dan Patterson, who is a social studies teacher at Alta, says that the biggest success is getting students in the front door every day, in a place where they can truly learn.

“We believe that every student matters. They all have bright futures and it’s our job to tap into their interest,” he says. “One of the most rewarding things that we can get out of teaching at Alta is seeing students grow over time and getting them through their struggles and adversity. Somehow, we are this big fishbowl with a lot of different personalities, but it really gels together.”

**A CLOSE-KNIT COMMUNITY:** Because of a smaller student population at Alta, teachers are able to form close relationships with students, getting to chat with them about their challenges and successes on a daily basis.





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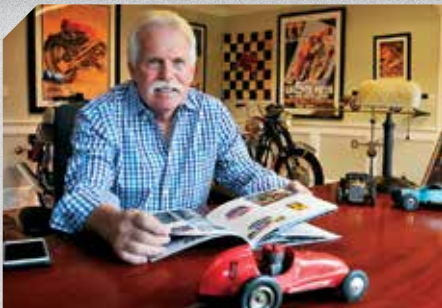
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# Jumping Through Hoops

An old-fashioned toy gains new popularity as fitness tool

By MAKAYLA SILVA / Photography by STAN GODLEWSKI



**WAIST WORKOUT:** Hula-Hoops, once considered a “retro” toy, has become a centerpiece for fitness at BringtheHoopla.



**H**ula-Hooping has come full circle in recent years, certainly since the original hoops were made popular by Wham-O in the late 1950s. Between then and now, the Hula-Hoop craze had lost most of its momentum, with sales remaining in a downward spiral for decades. But hooping as a form of fitness has made a comeback, re-emerging as a new and improved workout regime that fitness experts say offers an intense cardio workout.

Nicole Heriot-Mikula, owner of BringtheHoopla, has built a career around this classic slice of Americana. She says the ubiquitous pastime is changing the way people think about physical education.

“Hula-Hooping has provided me with the opportunity to empower thousands of children, set new precedents for fitness, and create a conversation around healthy minds and healthy bodies for children of all ages,” she says.

Heriot-Mikula launched BringtheHoopla in 2011. The business has since been restructured, shifting gears from creating custom-designed hoops to a becoming fully educational fitness company that focuses on children in pre-kindergarten through sixth grade.

Curricula offered by BringtheHoopla is designed to meet children at their physical and cognitive levels, while introducing challenge to encourage growth.

“We provide high-quality programming for children of all ages by using the hoop as a form of play, exercise and learning. Our unique curriculum aligns with state and national standards (Common Core) to ensure developmentally appropriate programming that promotes physical literacy,” she says.

Growing up in Shelton and graduating from Shelton High School, Heriot-Mikula pursued a BFA in Music Theater from The Hartt School at the University of Hartford, which led to an 11-year career in theater in New York City.

“As an actor, there’s a few things you need: persistence, determination, the ability to work well with others, always remembering to put your best foot forward, and a sense of humor. I took that all with me,” she says.

But after living in New York City for a decade, Heriot-Mikula wanted to build something from the ground up.



**FUN AND GAMES:** Nicole Heriot-Mikula, owner of BringtheHoopla, says the Hula-Hoop is changing the way people think about physical education.



**GOING IN CIRCLES:** BringtheHoopla offers kids both fun and fitness.

“I wanted to be a part of the community again and give back to a community that meant so much to me growing up. There is such a strong feeling of solidarity and teamwork to give back to the place you call home and when we started this business, that’s what we did. We still strive to give back as much as we can,” she says. “My dear friend in Seymour loved to Hula-Hoop and began constructing hoops, and she asked if I wanted to go into business together and see where it could take us.”

BringtheHoopla’s first class was a hooping fitness class held in downtown Shelton, upstairs at the Echo Hose Fire Department in 2011.

“Then we continued to book whatever came our way. I totally believe that in business, if someone is interested, as the business owner you figure out a way to make it happen,” she says. “Through the summer, we did beach classes and a ton of free stuff just to be a part of the community. And that was the first year of business – diving in and beginning a business with complete passion and excitement and really not knowing the exact direction we were going in.”

Although Heriot-Mikula never initially imagined she would venture into the educational fitness world, she points to BringtheHoopla’s quality of programming and instructors as the number one reason the business has sustained and grown to what it is today.

“A business is only as strong as your team is. I am very grateful to have an incredible team, led by Sarah Murphy, our program director, and who I believe is the true face of BringtheHoopla,” she says. “We are indeed a small business,



but our sales increase year after year, primarily by word of mouth, and as they say, that’s the best form of advertising.”

Using positive reinforcement and encouragement to foster persistence, self-confidence and free expression for all students, Heriot-Mikula has worked to integrate the company’s hooping programs into the educational ecosystem across the state.


BringtheHoopla has partnered with schools and organizations across Connecticut, including the Hartford Public Library, the Connecticut Folk Festival in New Haven, Mary R. Tisko Elementary School in Branford, the Bethany Parks and Recreation Commission, and Naugatuck Public Schools, among many others.

“Being integrated in school districts is an organic process that takes patience and consistent efforts,” she says.

“Our program is successful within schools because our curriculum embodies the key themes and conversations we need to be having with our children about the importance of physical fitness, self-esteem, self-confidence, and loving ourselves for who we are.”

BringtheHoopla’s early learning curriculum is a six-week, hoop-centered program designed for children ages three to five. The curriculum supports and aligns with the Connecticut Early Learning and Development standards,





"Our program is successful within schools because our curriculum embodies the key themes and conversations we need to be having with our children about the importance of physical fitness, self-esteem, self-confidence, and loving ourselves for who we are."

**FUN FOR EVERYONE:** Heriot-Mikula can fully customize programming for any setting, ranging from schools and libraries to community and senior centers, birthday parties, corporate events and ladies' nights.

using Hoopla-Hoops as a tool to promote physical activity and offer developmentally appropriate learning experiences.

For children in kindergarten through sixth grade, BringtheHoopla offers 60- to 90-minute programs over a multi-week session, with the capability of extending up to 15 weeks. The elementary curriculum focuses on physical literacy, team building, conversational and group discussion skills, positive self-image, and self-expression through movement and dance.

The beauty of BringtheHoopla, Heriot-Mikula says, is the ability to fully customize programming for any setting, ranging from schools and libraries to community and senior centers, birthday parties, corporate events and ladies' nights.

"This past year, we facilitated programming in over 250 public and private schools, libraries, summer camps and preschools. We taught over 3,800 students. We are always partnering with organizations to continue our outreach and to build awareness of who we are and what we do," she says.

Joanne Bonomo, site coordinator for the City of Bridgeport's Lighthouse Program, says BringtheHoopla has been a partner in its summer program for the last three years.

The Lighthouse Program was designed to blend community and school visions to give Bridgeport's youth educational, cultural, and recreational opportunities through diverse programming. The summer program runs for five weeks, incorporating science, dance, art, theater, music and various sports.

"Initially, I wasn't sure if the kids would take to Hula-Hooping. But it's a program that they really look forward to," says Bonomo. "The instructors are incredible; it's amazing what they can do with a Hula-Hoop. The program is both a social and physical experience."

She says the summer program serves more than 200 students.

"Kids today, they're either on their phone or playing a game. They don't seem to get the physical activity that they need," Bonomo says. "Hula-Hooping gives them the outlet they need for physical activity and also creativity." ■

**"This past year, we facilitated programming in over 250 public and private schools, libraries, summer camps and preschools. We taught over 3,800 students." – Nicole Heriot-Mikula**







## Don't Let Go

**I**t makes sense to let it go. You've spent the last 26 years raising four lovely children into blessed adulthood. Your three girls have good, stable jobs. Two are married, and the third may never get married, and that's just fine. She has two cats, three fish, and a vacation home in Vermont. Frankly, she's doing better than you ever did.

The boy is still chasing down his lifelong dream of hand modeling in New York, but that's fine, too, because before he left home to pursue this ridiculous modeling career, you made damn sure that he got his degree in finance. When this hand modeling dream ends

in ruin (his hands aren't even that attractive), he'll be equipped to find a real job with a real paycheck.

So now, with all four of your kids having flown the coop, you're rethinking the contents of your home.

You've served 10,000 meals at this dining room table. It's time for something new. Something modern. That's why it's sitting on your front lawn, alongside the board games that your kids loved to play on snow days. And the dresser from the girls' bedroom that is now in your sewing room. And the rolltop desk where your oldest spent long nights groaning about homework. Propped atop the desk is the crock pot that

was recently replaced by something faster and smaller but somehow also bigger and better.

It's spring. Yard sale season. The optimal time to clean out the clutter and make space for the new, or maybe just make space for space. The perfect time to reclaim the corners of rooms that have been absent for so long, hidden under piles of never-read New Yorker magazines and plastic bins of toddler clothes, and a cat tree for a cat that passed away during the first Obama administration.

After a week of prepping and pricing and plastering posters, the time has come. You'll replace stuff with money, and if you earn enough,

maybe you'll finally be able to spend a weekend in Vermont since your youngest won't let you use her home.

Damn ingrate.

The scavengers arrive before the appointed hour, hoping to snatch up the best of your offerings. A steely-eyed man offers you \$25 for the table and \$5 for each chair. You blink in disbelief.

Did he not see the price tag?

You bought the table at the furniture store on Park Road that's now a combination Dunkin' Donuts/Baskin Robbins. A vaping store now sits where you and your spouse loaded it into the back of Bill's pickup truck. Bill and Donna were your best friends back then. Both had been in your wedding party. Donna might've been your maid of honor if your sister wasn't so damn needy.

That was a long time ago. You haven't seen Bill and Donna in more than a decade. There was no falling out. No conscious decision to stop seeing each other. One day they were your favorite movie and buffalo wings partners, and then, seemingly the next day, they were gone.

Did the steely-eyed guy really say \$25? We bought the table for more than \$800, and that was almost 30 years ago. A table like this could go for millions today.

The man counters with \$45. He says the number like I should appreciate the fact that he's nearly doubled his offer. What could he

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possibly be thinking?

Does he have any idea how many birthdays have been celebrated at this table? How many overcooked Thanksgiving turkeys have been eaten at this table without complaint, lest I give everyone in the house the silent treatment for days? This is the table where our eldest opened her acceptance letter to Dartmouth, thus dooming our plans for early retirement. This is where our youngest fell asleep during dinner one night, his face landing in his plate of spaghetti.

My spouse and I may have even had sex on this table one or twice, though admittedly that might not help the price much.

"Fine," the man says. "\$75, and \$10 for each chair. I tripled my

offer on the table and doubled it on the chairs. Final offer." He rocks back on his heels. In his mind, the table is already his. This offer – enough money for dinner for two with dessert and a drink at Applebee's – is supposed to do the trick.

It does. I tell him to leave. Get off my lawn. The yard sale is over.

What could we have been thinking? Why did we think we could ever place a price tag on these priceless memories? Objects that shared our space and time cannot be sold to strangers who have no understanding of their intrinsic value. These are scavengers that I have invited onto my property. Heartless, soulless bargain hunters. What do they know of the value of memories and nostalgia?

Modernity be damned. Now I understand those hoarders that I see on TV. Maybe not the newspapers and the empty boxes of Chinese food and ancient computers. That's crazy. But this dining room table and chairs? And that box of board games? The rolltop desk? Who needs a little more space and a weekend in Vermont when I stare at those things that are so much more than things?

Yard sales are great for folks who want to dispense with their memories. I plan to hold onto mine, and never let them go. ■


**"Yard sales are great for folks who want to dispense with their memories. I plan to hold onto mine, and never let them go."**





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