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# SEASONS

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## Stepping Forward UPDATE

### Grant Resources Doubled

Through The Community Foundation's 2021 annual responsive grant program, nearly \$4 million was awarded to 72 local nonprofits. This unprecedented total is far beyond what has been done in the past and reflects new spending and new priorities around racial equity and COVID recovery. In addition to increasing grant resources, The Foundation modified its application process to increase accessibility, resulting in a quarter of the grant awards going to organizations that are new to The Foundation.

### New Grant Programs and Partnerships

During a time of increased food insecurity, the newly established Basic Needs Fund granted \$160,000 for the distribution of meals, groceries and personal hygiene items to area residents in need. Ten organizations were selected by an advisory committee for the Fund's inaugural round of grantmaking.

Under Stepping Forward, a Racial Equity and Creative Healing grant program was developed in partnership with The Arts Council of Greater New Haven. The program is aimed at promoting community healing and racial justice. Sixteen local artists and art projects, including a Black film festival, neighborhood jazz workshops, youth podcasting and a platform for local hip-hop artists were selected by a panel of peers to receive \$583,000 over the summer.

A second new grant program created in partnership with the University of Connecticut is expanding leadership and career development opportunities for ten professionals currently employed at area nonprofits. The BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color) Cohort for Nonprofit Leadership starts training in the Fall. The program lasts for 2 years and offers undergraduate or graduate credit and a \$1,000 scholarship toward future studies at UConn.



2021 Cohort for Nonprofit Leadership members. (L-R) Top row: Jahnice Cajigas, Antonio Coles, Frankie Douglass, Chanelle Goldson and Christian Aviles; Bottom row: Victoria Massey, Ala Ochumare, Landon Osborn, Nicole Sanclemente and Kimani Sioux Williams. Photo credit: Dexter Atlas Photographer.

Visit [cfgnh.org/steppingforward](https://cfgnh.org/steppingforward) for up-to-date information about **Stepping Forward** and The Foundation's progress toward helping to address the impact of COVID-19 and advancing racial equity.



The **COMMUNITY** Foundation *for* Greater New Haven

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# Seasons' Greetings



Mary Hawkins

Welcome to the spring issue of *Seasons Magazines*!

In this issue, we're inspired by warmer temps, a season of new beginnings, and getting outside to experience nature and explore all of the beauty our state has to offer.

We take you on a journey along hiking trails in Connecticut where history has been made and continues to live on to this day. We're also giving

you a taco tour of the state, highlighting all of the best tacos to try in 2022, and we take a look at how wedding trends have changed to accommodate today's modern couples. Plus, we'll take a look at the history and evolution of the sport of lacrosse.

If you're in the mood for a little spring cleaning and sprucing up your home, we have tips for how to add some gorgeous landscaping without breaking the bank. We're also highlighting a special Connecticut family who is giving back to their community and beyond by providing special glasses to childhood eye cancer survivors.

We'd love for you to connect with us on social media and let us know what you think. You can find us on Facebook and Twitter.

Happy reading, and Happy Spring!

*Mary*

**Mary Hawkins**  
Editor  
*Seasons Magazines*



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**Mary Hawkins**

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**Doreen Chudoba**

For advertising information please  
contact Jim at (860) 413-2022  
[jjim@seasonsmagazines.com](mailto:jjim@seasonsmagazines.com)



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SEASONS of New Haven and Shoreline®

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Take Your Child to Work Day is a complete and total farce.

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## Chelsea Groton Bank: A Community-Centered Bank You Can Feel Good About

By **MARY HAWKINS**

**T**he past two years have been such a whirlwind for all of us, and everyone has had to shift or adjust their way of life, especially when it comes to our work and businesses. During the pandemic, plenty of people had to suddenly become accustomed to working from home in lieu of going into the office every day, which was easier on some than others. There are businesses that definitely lend themselves to remote working, Zoom meetings, and the like.

In other customer service-based industries, however, seeing clients and customers face-to-face is essential to not only the health of the business but to the happiness and satisfaction of everyone involved. Banking and real estate certainly fall into that category.

When most of the working world shifted to an at-home model in March 2020, Matt Morrell, Vice President, Retail

Lending Manager for Chelsea Groton Bank, continued going into the Glastonbury lending center every day. But while he did have children at home doing remote learning, it wasn't just having them home from school and needing a quiet space with no distractions that sent him into the office. It was quite the opposite, in fact. Having a presence in the community is important to Matt and to the community bank, which has been a fixture in our state for 167 years.

As all our lives were changed over the past 2 years, so was the real estate market, which saw a sudden boom and a much higher demand. Gone were the days of homes sitting on the market for months on end. Bidding wars suddenly were the new norm, and properties were scooped up practically the minute they were listed. Needless to say, the lack of housing inventory has greatly affected homebuyers and those working in the real estate business.



Morrell explains, “It’s affecting a lot of people. With the type of housing stock in Connecticut, empty nesters are looking for one-floor living, while younger people are looking for starter homes. Not everyone wants a four-bedroom colonial. It’s affecting people because they can’t move on to the next phase of their lives. It’s more work for everyone.”

While you’d think that rising interest rates would deter some buyers from purchasing a home right now, it’s important to keep in mind that the rates still are historically low, compared to what they’ve been in past years.

Morrell gave some insight into the trends he’s seeing, saying, “We do have people dropping out. But if you put it into context, rates are still historically low. There are some people who have never seen an interest rate higher than 3 ½ percent. If people are shopping at the top of their budget, a higher interest rate can definitely have an impact. But the mass media doesn’t help. People get scared off when they hear 3.9 percent vs. 2.9 percent.”

We can’t be certain what the future holds, but if you’re considering buying a house in the coming months, you shouldn’t be deterred by the uncertainty. There are certain things you can do to get your finances in order to make the process a whole lot smoother.

Morrell suggests reaching out regularly to your financier. “Check in weekly. When people extend their search, they need to take into account property taxes in different towns. But if it does take a while to find a house, they may have saved more money for a bigger down payment,” he advises.

Chelsea Groton is so much more than a bank, as they also offer educational programs to their home-buying customers to ensure they are as knowledgeable as possible before purchasing a home.

Morrell explains, “This is one of the hallmarks of community banking and community lending. We do have a first-time home buying class but more importantly, we have budgeting classes and help for people to understand their credit. One thing that many young people don’t understand is that we all start out with no credit and have to build it.”

The bottom line is that by using a community lender versus



Matt Morrell, Vice President, Retail Lending Manager for Chelsea Groton Bank

**Chelsea Groton is so much more than a bank, as they also offer educational programs to their home-buying customers to ensure they are as knowledgeable as possible before purchasing a home.**

going through a large bank, the buying experience becomes much more personal on both sides of the equation. Morell continues, “When we talk about community lending, it’s all about product. We keep our menu as expansive as we can. Geographically, we serve shoreline communities with million-dollar homes, inner-cities, and everything in between. For Chelsea, overarching all of that is that we try to invest in the communities we serve. That isn’t lip service. We’re don’t just sponsor one-off events, we’re giving funds and volunteer hours right here in our communities. I shop at my local Ace Hardware store before I shop at Home Depot. I want to do business with someone who’s invested in the community.” ■



#### About Chelsea Groton Bank

Based in Groton, Conn., Chelsea Groton Bank is a full-service mutually owned bank with over \$1.5 billion in assets. Chelsea Groton Bank’s products and services include consumer banking, business banking, mortgage and business lending, cash management, financial planning and financial education classes. With 14 branch locations throughout New London County and a Loan Production Office in Hartford County, Chelsea Groton Bank also provides online and mobile banking, 24-hour telephone banking, and nationwide ATM banking for individuals, families and businesses. To learn more, please visit [www.chelseagroton.com](http://www.chelseagroton.com). Member FDIC. Equal Housing Lender. NMLS Institution ID 402928.

# INTERVIEW WITH PAMELA BURR – CALIFORNIA CLOSETS CONNECTICUT DESIGNER

**A**s we head into Spring, one thing that's on many people's minds is Spring cleaning and maximizing the use of space in one's home. A great place to start is with your closet, though you might not be sure where to begin in terms of organization. California Closets is here to help! Connecticut designer Pamela Burr has some tried-and-true tips to help get you started.

## **Can you give us an overview of how the California Closets process works?**

No two closets are alike! We initially meet and review the space available and current inventory levels of clothing and personal items. Then, based on our discussions we collaborate on a design together that incorporates the clothing and customizes the space to fit individual needs and daily activity.

Once the design is finalized, we review the options and design elements. We offer a variety of finishes, traditional to modern builds and lots of accessories to personalize a beautiful and functional space.

## **If someone has a small closet and not a walk-in, are you still able to help them better organize it?**

At California Closets every design is custom which enables us to organize any size space. We take advantage of the vertical space and even a smaller space

can have hang, shelves and drawers. These are fun spaces to work with as the transformation can be dramatic.

## **In order to maximize space, what tips do you have for keeping your closet organized?**

1 – In order to have a stress-free space, the most important tip is to have only clothing and accessories that you wear and use. It is very hard to part with unused items, but it takes up space and time. Do a purge every season of unworn, old clothing. If there are items you do not want to part with, have a sentimental box that keeps these items on upper shelving or in another area of the house.

2 – We all love our shoes! If your closet is smaller, it is best to store only seasonal shoes on a few shelves. Then, other shoes can be stored in clear boxes on upper shelves or another closet. This way valuable real estate can be used for items we need to see every day.



3 – Another tip is to use slim hangers. This creates extra inches of hang space and offers a streamlined, uniform space.

## **Is it beneficial for people to transition the clothes in their closet along with the seasons?**

Clothes should be shifted for the seasons. If the closet is big enough, out of season clothes can be hung in the back of the closet and stored on upper shelves. If the closet is smaller, then out of season clothes can be stored elsewhere.

For more tips on how to transform your space, visit [californiaclosets.com](http://californiaclosets.com) or call 203.924.8444.

**“I love to see the transformation of the areas after installation and the reaction of my customers to the products they have chosen and the function of the space.” —PAMELA BURR**







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Richie Hucens. Photo by James Meehan.



# Generations of Music at Toad's Place

New book chronicles New Haven club that drew Springsteen, Dylan, and the Rolling Stones

By FRANK RIZZO

**F**rom the outside, little has changed at Toad's Place over its 45 years as a downtown New Haven nightclub, presenting jazz, blues, reggae, pop, hip-hop, rap, and rock performers who range from those just starting out to Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Famers.

The two-story venue on York Street still has its long green awning, red brick walls, and iconic logo of a spats-wearing, monocled amphibian dandy strutting his stuff. Though its hand-painted poster boards promoting upcoming shows have been replaced with electronic signage and its interior has been expanded and spiffed up, the basic vibe remains the same. Bands still rock, crowds still dance, and now multiple generations of music lovers can claim the club as a part of their forever-young history. It's become as much a New Haven institution filled with tradition and memories as its

next-door neighbor, Yale's staid watering hole, Mory's.

A new book — *The Legendary Toad's Place* (Globe Pequot Press) — chronicles the club's nearly half century of entertainment and drama, on stage and off, including performances by Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan, The Rolling Stones, and Billy Joel.

Written by the club's long-time owner Brian Phelps and former *New Haven Register* columnist Randall Beach, the book is an affectionate look back at the colorful life of a venue that has survived the test of many musical times.

As it enters its sixth decade, it has survived and flourished while other clubs have shuttered. It has weathered management dramas, out-maneuvered Yale for ownership of the building, and adapted to a dramatically changing music industry as well as ever-new musical tastes.

"After telling friends stories over the years, people



would say I should really write a book before I start forgetting everything that occurred at the club over the decades,” says the New Haven born-Phelps, 67. He began at Toad’s in his early 20s in the ‘70s as manager of the club, before becoming partners with its original owner Mike Spoerndle, until taking over as full owner in the mid-‘90s.

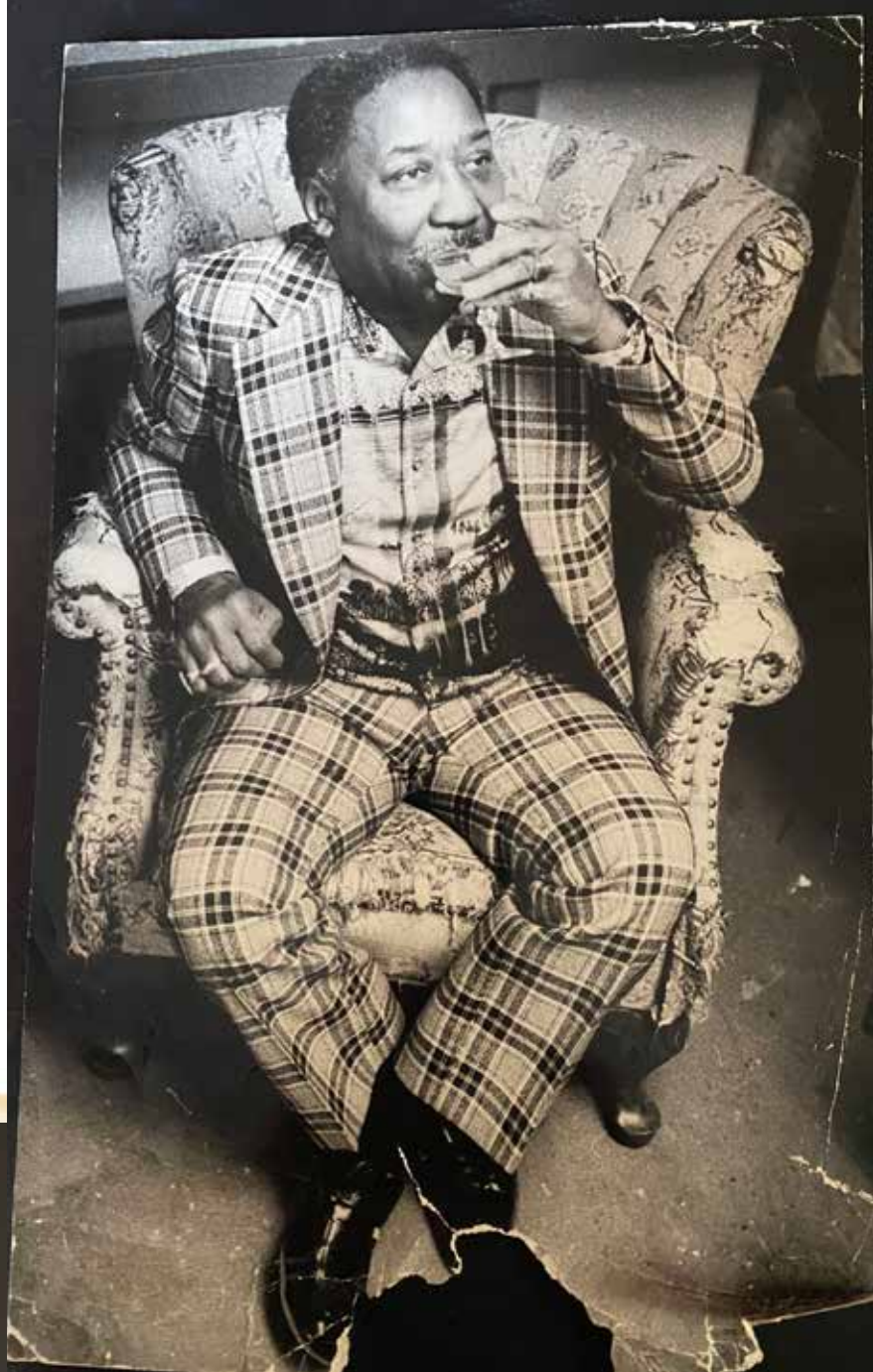
“We tried to adapt to what was going on in the music world,” says Phelps, as one of reasons for the club’s longevity. He also says the club avoided being pigeon-holed as one particular type of nightspot. “We became a full music spectrum type of club, playing all different genres of music.”

## RESTAURANT BEGINNINGS

Toad’s (the “Place” in its name is usually dropped in conversation) began in 1975 not as a nightclub but as a casual restaurant in the building that once housed the burger joint, Hungry Charlie’s. Spoerndle — a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, which was located in New Haven at the time — and two friends opened the new eatery in 1975.

But it wasn’t exactly packing them in, and that’s when Spoerndle figured what young people in this college town really wanted was a place to hang out, listen to music, dance — and drink. (At the time, the drinking age was 18.) The following year, Spoerndle bought out his partners and Phelps, who ran a karate studio above Cutler’s Record Store on Broadway, came in as manager for the re-configured space.

Early bookings featured such regional acts as the Simms Brothers, John Cafferty and Beaver Brown,



MuddyWaters. Photo by James Meehan.

the Scratch Band, the Helium Brothers, Roomful of Blues, Jake and the Family Jewels, Tower of Power, the Shaboo All-Stars, and folk singer Randy Burns. Because record-keeping was not comprehensive over the decades, Phelps can only estimate that Beaver Brown and Tower of Power played at Toad’s more than any other act.

Another reason for Toad’s success was its ability to book name bands, and that was due to the club’s association with rock promoter Jimmy Koplik, who was producing shows at the New Haven Coliseum and other arenas, stadiums, and festivals. Though New Haven was seen as a secondary market, the level of acts became significantly more high-profile because of Koplik’s association with the music industry and its artists.

“Jimmy was an extremely important part in our entire process over the years,” says Phelps.



Tim Curry. Photo by James Meehan.



Clockwise: Jim Carroll, Dave Edmunds, Marshall Crenshaw, Phoebe Snow, Leon Redbone, Martha Davis of The Motels. Photo artwork by Frank Rizzo.



Starting in the late '70s and into the '80s, more and more acts that were famous — or about-to-be — filled Toad's stage: Cyndi Lauper, Billy Idol, Blondie, The Red Hot Chili Peppers, Huey Lewis and the News, Stray Cats, Pat Benatar, Phoebe Snow, Michael Bolton, Phish, Rickie Lee Jones, David Cassidy, David Bowie, Ice Cube, Joe Cocker, U2, Beck, The Black-Eyed Peas, The Kinks, Patti Smith, Bon Jovi, Peter Dinklage, Meatloaf, New Kids on the Block, Radiohead, Kanye West, The Go-Gos, Hanson, The B-52s, and scores of others.

But classic legends of all musical styles also called Toad's home: B.B. King, Count Basie, Bo Diddley, Woody Herman, Buddy Rich, Joan Baez, Little Richard, Dizzy Gillespie, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, Muddy Waters, Santana, and Herbie Hancock, among many others. The acts ranged from saloon singer Tom Waits to pop powerhouse Tom Jones, and iconoclastic figures such as Randy Newman, The Talking Heads, R.E.M., David Bowie, and The Ramones.

As Toad's gained a national reputation, it became a must-stop for all touring acts. Even performers who filled stadiums sought the place out either as a place for an after-concert jam, such as Bruce Springsteen's legendary performance there — or to try out new material in a surprise gig, such as The Rolling Stones, or a marathon show by Bob Dylan, or to record a live album, such as Billy Joel.

But there were a few misses along the way, too, such as Madonna because her asking price was too high; ditto for Kurt Cobain and Nirvana; when Paul McCartney backed out of a Yale Bowl gig following neighborhood protests against rock crowds, so went the expectation of the former Beatle playing Toad's in a post-show jam with the band NRBQ, a McCartney favorite.

But most everyone else in the music biz — especially in the '80s and '90s, which was a period energized by MTV, the advent of CDs and personal listening devices, and big rock events — wanted to come party at the club.

That period was a special time, says Phelps. It was also before the full force of casinos competing for big name acts was felt, the fall of the New Haven Coliseum, and the presence of the College Street Music Hall, now the club's most direct rival.

"Sometimes what's playing at Toad's



The front entrance to Toad's Place today in downtown New Haven. Photo by Frank Rizzo.

now is a different genre of music than some older folks are used to," he says. "Sometimes people say to me, 'Why don't you get the 'good' bands back?' But what's good to them isn't good to someone else."

## BIG MIKE

Another immeasurable aspect of Toad's appeal was the personality of its original owner, Mike Spoerndle, a teddy bear of a guy, whose warm smile and easy-going style made the club a welcoming venue for acts and audiences alike.

"Big Mike was the face of Toad's, but also the heart and soul of the place," says Beach, who adds that the partnership with Phelps — who focused on the club's business management — complemented each other. "Brian was the guy who kept everything going, especially when Mike started to decline because of the addictions."

Phelps became partners in the business with Spoerndle in the mid-80s. In 1998, Spoerndle sold his share of the club to Phelps, and Spoerndle died at the age of 59 of drug-related issues in 2011.

As for its relationship with its surrounding neighbor, Yale, Phelps says: "We have a great relationship with Yale now, though over the years, we've had our ups and downs."

One conflict happened when the owner of the building — the club leased the property — put it up for sale and Yale offered hundreds of thousands of dollars over the assessed value, says Phelps. But as the lease owner, Spoerndle could

buy it if Toad's could match the offer — which it did.

Despite the stars, the music, and the money, managing Toad's was not as easy as it looked," says Phelps. "It's tough and it's rough. The stress really did a number on me. My teeth were ground to almost nothing, and I had to have crowns on every one of my teeth."

Phelps says even he doesn't know who many of the current hot bands are "so I have to do research and make calls and see what kind of business we would do."

As for his future — and Toad's, Phelps — who is sole owner of the club and its property — says, "I'll probably be there for a while longer."

And his most memorable night at the club? So many to choose from, he says. But when pressed, he says it was the August night in 1989 when The Rolling Stones — which had been playing stadiums — played at Toad's. The band, which was preparing to go out on tour for the first time in eight years, wanted an out of the way place to try out its new songs and get their performance chops before they hit the stadiums. Admission to Toad's that night was \$3.01.

"We were in every newspaper in the country — and even in newspapers from other countries, including China."

It's been one eventful run, says Phelps. "When I think of it, presidents of the U.S. Supreme Court justices, famous actors, they've all been to Toad's. That's something." ■



# Middlesex Health Center for Golf Performance

**T**hink about it: a golf swing is not the most natural movement in daily life. We don't usually shift our hips and twist our torso while putting away the groceries.

A new program at Middlesex Health promises to analyze your swing and help you feel great and golf better while you're out on the links.

In early 2021, Middlesex became the official healthcare provider for the Connecticut State Golf Association and the welcoming sponsor of the Connecticut Golf Show. So, the timing was perfect to begin the Middlesex Health Center for Golf Performance.

Through the Middlesex Health Center for Golf Performance, physical therapists who are Titleist Performance Institute level 1 and medical certified provide a multi-point physical assessment that focuses on specific body movements, such as body rotation and posture. They also conduct a swing analysis using a sophisticated motion device. A specialized computer program gathers key data points and then creates graphs that illustrate the efficiency of your swing.

Using this system, alongside the physical assessment, Middlesex Health physical therapists will help you learn your pain points and limitations. This data will then drive improvement plans that include follow-up sessions and at-home exercises and conditioning that are individually tailored to you. This will help as you strive to be a stronger, healthier, better golfer.

The TPI Certification program is an evidence-based, educational pathway designed to teach industry professionals how to increase player performance by understanding how the body functions during the golf

swing. Brian Taber, director of physical rehabilitation at Middlesex Health, earned his doctorate in physical therapy from the MGH Institute of Health Professions. He received both his Bachelor's and Master of Science degrees in physical therapy from UConn. And in addition to his clinical degrees, Taber has completed extensive continuing education courses and is TPI Certified.

A golfer himself, Taber is excited to offer this program as a way to help people head off injury while increasing their enjoyment of the sport. Overall, five Middlesex physical therapists are certified in this type of training.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it seems to Taber that more people took up golf because it's a healthy outdoor activity. However, they might not know the proper body mechanics when swinging a club.

Seasons Magazines sat down with Taber to learn all about the new Middlesex Health Center for Golf Performance. Here are some excerpts from the interview.

## **Q. How is golf swing analysis different from regular physical therapy?**

**A.** If you're injured, your doctor will prescribe physical therapy focusing on a specific injury or ailment.

The Middlesex Health Center for Golf Performance is a little different than regular physical therapy. The Titleist Performance Institute has put together the gold standard for how to screen and assess people who play golf and how their body movements can impact their swing. Maybe the golfer is tight or has discomfort with their swing.

If we put these two pieces together—the Titleist training and a practitioner with years of physical therapy experience—we can help people have a more successful and enjoyable golf experience.





Marvin Berg checking out all the Middlesex Health Center for Golf Performance has to offer at the Connecticut Golf Show.

### **Q. Can you describe the program?**

**A.** The first visit is a 90-minute assessment. Golfers bring a club with them, usually one of the irons. The first part will be a conversation about goals and challenges. Then, we go right into a 16-point screening of body mechanics, posture, and stability. We watch them swing just visually, and we set them up with a motion analysis system that measures trunk rotation, arm movements, and hand movements. It simulates overall timing and gives us a 3D rendering of what the person looks like while they are swinging.

The focus is to look at you as a golfer and look at what those limitations are doing to your swing and how we can improve your movement before you get injured.

We have an area that is dedicated to this analysis and offers enough room for participants to swing a club, allowing us to really see how they look firsthand.

All five of us are avid golfers. We bring together our enjoyment of the game with the expertise to make improvements in other golfers' games.

### **Q. Who is the typical client for this experience?**

**A.** Anybody who is playing golf, whether they are brand new or play once or twice a year or play every week, can benefit. It's for someone who wants to see an improvement in their game and who is interested in learning stretching and strengthening exercises to improve their body mechanics.

For example, say a person noticed some back discomfort during their swing. We would assess them to look at all the mechanics – including the movement of the back, shoulder, and knee. There are so many movements in golf. What portion of the swing is problematic? Is the posture off? Is the speed correct in each portion of the swing? Is the pelvis rotation delayed? What about the hip or lower trunk mobility? Is there a strength deficit leading to an incorrect pelvis movement?

We will figure out what's leading to the discomfort. Based on the assessment, the golfer will leave with the results, and we'll give them some type of homework like strengthening, balance, or stretching. We offer follow-up sessions that allow individuals to work one-on-one with our team so that they can work on any limitations that are identified. There's also no age limit. We will work with teenagers up to seniors.

### **Q. How much does it cost?**

**A.** The assessment is \$125 for 90 minutes. The follow-up appointments are \$95 each. Insurance does not cover this. If you have a true injury, you should focus on that and get it better and then come in for the golf swing assessment. Some people could get the job done in one session; others may need two to three follow-ups. We like to take time to



A specialized computer program gathers key data points and then creates graphs that illustrate the efficiency of your swing.

work on goals then come back in a week or two and make adjustments.

### **Q. Should everyone warm up before golf?**

**A.** Yes! Everyone should warm up before golf. When you think about the movement to produce a swing, it's not like a normal movement you go through in everyday life. You should start out with some gentle trunk rotation and hip movements. Start small and slow and work up to a full swing.

You may also want to work on trunk and shoulder flexibility, wrist, and elbow flexibility. When you're not playing golf, you should work on strengthening your whole body. Your ability to generate power comes from the legs and overall conditioning. People think it's not a physical game, but realistically, if you play 18 holes and are walking, it requires overall fitness and stamina. If you're not in shape, you'll find you're good for the first few holes, and then you'll get tired. Aim for aerobic conditioning, walking for fitness, jogging, the elliptical or stationary bike, lower body and upper body strength training, and global overall fitness. ■

*Visit [MiddlesexHealth.org/tpi](http://MiddlesexHealth.org/tpi) for more information.*





# Put back pain behind you.

You won't find back and neck pain sufferers sitting on the sidelines these days. Thanks to more precise, less invasive procedures that weren't available not so long ago.

**[MiddlesexHealth.org/Spine](https://MiddlesexHealth.org/Spine)**

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# Buying, Selling, and Rising Interest Rates

By TERESA M. PELHAM

**F**ollowing an uncharacteristically busy winter season, real estate professionals are gearing up for spring. Dawn Gagliardi Esq., a licensed Realtor with the Corrado Team at Coldwell Banker Realty in South Windsor and West Hartford, offers her take on what's to come in the coming months.

## **Q: How does Connecticut compare with other states in terms of real estate inventory?**

**A:** Connecticut is right in the middle as far as housing inventory. While we still have far fewer homes available than in previous years—we have about a two-month supply right now and historically have had a six-month supply of homes on the market at any given time—we are still doing fairly well compared to half of the country. The states with the lowest inventory are Hawaii, South Dakota, DC, New York, and North Dakota. The good news is that inventory will be picking up as we move into the spring market, so be on the lookout for more homes for sale to pop up in your area.

## **Q: If I'm going to sell my house in five years or less, is it worth it to install solar panels?**

**A:** The short answer is no. Solar panels are a wonderful way to save money and help the environment, but they're an added hurdle when selling a home. Buyers have to go through an additional application process to get approved for the solar panel lease, which can be fairly involved and time-consuming. It's a little easier if the panels are owned outright by the sellers and conveyed with the purchase of the home, but many solar companies don't have the best reputation for being responsive if there are any issues with the panels themselves or the roof underneath them, causing buyers to pause when considering purchasing a home with solar panels. I personally am all for them and am considering putting them on my own home, but if selling is in the near future, I wouldn't recommend it.

## **Q: With so many buyers making offers above the listing price, how do you determine a good listing price in this market?**

**A:** When I'm pricing a home I look at a few different factors: condition, size, and comparable home sales in the area. Of course, this is far more challenging with home prices increasing seemingly almost daily. I think the key is not to overprice your home based on what you think it will close for but instead price it reasonably so that buyers see the value and want to actually see it. Even with the inventory as low as it is, if a buyer feels a home isn't worth the asking price, they won't even bother to see it in person, and you cut yourself off from a large pool of buyers. Pricing a home at or



**Dawn Gagliardi**

even slightly below market value will entice buyers to make offers, which will lead to a bidding war, which leads to the home selling for over asking price.

## **Q: How far in advance of looking for a home should a buyer get prequalified?**

**A:** The first step is to contact your Realtor, but before you even start looking at homes online, you should speak to a local lender about your purchasing power. Your Realtor can usually connect you with a lender—I have amazing lenders in the area that I work with regularly—but make sure they are local and not just from a big bank or one of the many online companies. Even if you don't think you're "ready" to get pre-approved, I highly suggest having that conversation with a lender because they can give you helpful tips and guidance to increase your credit score or pay down your debt. The bottom line is, it's never too early to speak to a lender, and can actually be the best move you can make to prepare to purchase a home.

## **Q: What are some trends in staging homes?**

**A:** Even in this crazy sellers' market, staging a home is still one of the best ways to make the most money on your sale. From rearranging furniture and painting to taking on big renovations, staging is one of the most important parts of my five-step selling process. One of the big themes we're seeing now is a shift from painting walls grey to using warmer tones like grieger (grey/beige) as well as more playful colors with blue or purple undertones. We're also seeing people gravitate to more funky and bold colors on their cabinets like blues and greens or

doing two-tone cabinets with white on the top and a darker color on the bottom. Although wallpaper has recently made a big comeback in the decorating world, I wouldn't recommend it for the purposes of selling because it's so specific and a potential buyer's taste may be very different from your own. The key is to keep the space neutral while also making it inviting and interesting.

## **Q: How much would you expect an average home seller to spend on staging?**

I have clients who spend anywhere from nothing to \$20,000. Sometimes staging can just be making the best use of the space in your house with the furniture and decorations you already have, or simply decluttering your home. Some sellers choose to paint rooms or cabinets or replace dated hardware or light fixtures, and when done themselves, this is a fairly inexpensive way to give your home a facelift. Some sellers want to get every penny they can from the sale, so with the help of my stager and me, they're able to do the renovations that add the most value to their homes and get them top dollar on their sale. There's no right or wrong answer but knowing the options you have to help get you the most money possible on your sale is key in this market.

## **Q: Do you think rising interest rates will greatly affect the market this year?**

**A:** Interest rates are still historically low, with the average now being around 3.5%. Right before the pandemic, the rates were at an average of 3.95% in 2019 and 4.54% in 2018. The Fed is predicted to increase the interest rates to over 4% again in 2023, but I don't see this affecting the market much. The number of buyers looking for homes has continued to grow, and there still isn't enough inventory to satisfy their needs, so regardless of the slow but steady increase in interest rates, we will still see a hot sellers' market for the next one to two years.



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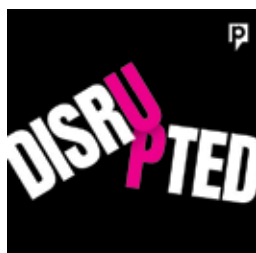
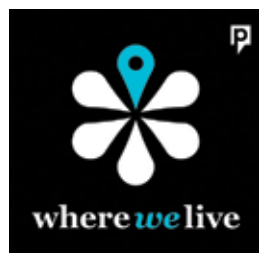
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# Spring Home Landscaping

How to Do It Without Breaking the Bank  
(or the Environment)

By JANE LATUS

Are you looking out your window, itching to start messing about in your yard? Or are you unsure where to begin, and concerned about how much it will cost to beautify your little piece of Earth?

Either way, expert gardeners have good news for you. You can spend less, work less – and meanwhile, attract birds, butterflies, and bees – by following a few simple tips. Their chief advice? Plant natives.

“We don’t garden smart. We try to work against nature. It makes gardening harder, and more expensive,” says Margery Winters, assistant director of Roaring Brook Nature Center in Canton and a lecturer in the State of Connecticut Master Gardener Program.







Margery Winters let part of her backyard grow into this meadow of native wildflowers.

## TIPS FOR BEGINNERS AND NOT-SO BEGINNERS

**Sarah Bailey, coordinator of the state Master Gardener Program, suggests:**

- Plant small areas: choose a spot to concentrate on. Make a multi-year plan but start on one area. “It’s less overwhelming, and you spread the cost and work. You’re also spreading the enjoyment and learning as you go.”
- Plant small things: plants grow surprisingly quickly, and smaller plants cost less.
- Don’t skimp on focal points, like evergreens and anchor plants.
- Leave room to grow: don’t place plants too close to each other or to foundations.
- If you want an instant full effect: fill in with annuals.
- If you rent: focus on annuals.

## SPRING SEASON SPECIFICS

It’s easy to focus on those beautiful flowers, but gardening begins with, depends on, and affects the soil. “People don’t pay any attention to soil, and it’s a limited resource,” says Winters.

Before you do anything, get your soil tested. The University of Connecticut offers inexpensive testing, and the results come with recommendations. Testing can be done any time of year, but if you want to beat the crowd, get it done as early in the year as possible.

“It will save you considerable money when you find what you don’t have to put down,” says Bailey.

### Some other tips from Bailey, Winters, and Farmington River Watershed Association Executive Director Aimee Petras:

- Practice “No Mow May.” At least wait, says Petras, until after forsythia blooms. This gives valuable undisturbed time to beneficial insects and allows low-growing flowers like violets to provide pollen in an otherwise scarce time.
- Tidy up edges, but stay out of garden beds, because the wet soil is easily compacted.
- Prune in February or March, before birds start nesting, and when you can see the shape of the shrub.
- Leave leaf litter under as many shrubs and in







**One reason for the growing demand for native plants: they're much less work**  
 – Lisa Turoczi, owner of Earth Tones Native Plants in Woodbury.  
 Photo by HT Photography

perennial beds as possible. But if you want a more tidy look near the house, remove leaves and put down bark mulch.

- It's best to plant trees and shrubs before it gets hot, or in the fall. Otherwise, prepare to haul a lot of water if your hose doesn't reach.
- Chemical fertilizers and pesticides are not essential for plant life, and they kill bees and pollute the water supply. As for weeds: in small areas, they can be killed with vinegar or boiling water. Hand-held propane torches are handy for large areas, like gravel driveways. Winters offers another option: "Adopt tolerance."

## WORK WITH NATURE

You'll save money and time by planting natives. They're more likely to thrive, as they're already adapted to grow here. And as a wonderful plus, they'll fuel insects, birds, bees, and butterflies.

"When I garden, I try to think about



who's going to eat them [plants]. I want them to be functioning," says Winters. "Think of the garden as a place for bees and birds, and how what you plant is making a difference."

Besides, she says, "It's no harder to plant a native plant than a non-native."

This doesn't mean you can't plant your favorites. "Peonies aren't native. I can't live without them," Bailey says. "It's about balance. If you have 75 percent native plants, including shrubs and especially trees, you are a sustainable gardener for insects and birds."

Lisa and Kyle Turoczi opened Earth Tones Native Plants in Woodbury in 2004, offering 20 species of native perennials. They now offer 400 species of trees, shrubs, grasses, perennials, and ferns.

Their business has grown because "People's eyes have opened. Your ecosystem is very local. It's not just a pretty plant, it's a part of your society," says Lisa Turoczi. Plus, she says, people have learned that non-natives





Earth Tones offers 400 species of trees, shrubs, grasses, perennials, and ferns.

require more work, when instead you can “Relax, enjoy, and bird-watch.”

### FOCUS ON SHRUBS

Shrubs cost more at first but are less expensive long-term. “They last an awfully long time,” says Winters. And if you plant native shrubs, they’ll attract birds even in winter. That’s a pleasure for bird-lovers who no longer put out bird feeders because bears are out year-round in this warming climate.

### REDUCE YOUR LAWN SIZE

Lawns have their uses – just ask kids and dogs.

But while grass is inexpensive initially, long-term, it requires treatments, expensive equipment, and a lot of water. It doesn’t contribute to the ecosystem but does contribute to air, water, and noise pollution.

Experts recommend reducing your lawn size. For what lawn remains, they warn against applying herbicides, which kill early spring pollinators.

Before wasting money on treatments, get that UConn soil test. Connecticut has acidic soils, and if you want green grass, you’re going to have to raise the pH – but first find out by how much, says Petras. “All I have to do is apply lime,” she says of her lawn.

If you’re not a dandelion fan, know that keeping your grass tall shades out weeds. Mow no shorter than 3 inches (4 is even better).

You can turn a section of lawn into a garden bed without having to dig up grass, says Winters. Lay out a garden



hose as a guide and remove a one-foot swath of grass as a buffer. Cover the area with cardboard or several layers of newspaper. It will smother the grass and decay. Within two years, you'll have ready-to-plant soil.

But what about the appearance meanwhile? Accept that landscape design is a process, says Winters. "It doesn't look messy if it's intentional."

## GROW A MEADOW

You can turn some of your lawn into a meadow without removing the grass or buying wildflower seeds. Just let your lawn grow. Winters suggests mowing a path around or through it, and adding a garden sculpture, to make it look intentional.

In a couple of years, wildflowers will grow. Mow once a year, waiting until after the first frost because the meadow supplies pollinators until then. Winters' backyard meadow includes Goldenrod, Monarda, Mountain Mint, Rudbeckia, and Phlox.

## THE "HELL STRIP"

That's the area between the sidewalk and street that gets pummeled with salty water. "People give it up to grass," says Petras. But the grass never does well. Petras chips away at hers each year, replacing more of the sad grass with easy-grow natives like Sedum, Rudbeckia, Echinacea, Thyme, and Sage. Now, it serves a purpose, she says. "I saw a goldfinch in my hell strip, getting pollen from one of the plants."



Heavenly: Aimee Petras now sees goldfinches feasting on flowers in her former "hell strip."

## UConn SOIL TESTING SERVICE:

Soil Testing Lab ([uconn.edu](http://uconn.edu))

## GARDEN CLUB TOURS:

Federated Garden Clubs of CT  
([ctgardenclubs.org](http://ctgardenclubs.org))

## YEAR-ROUND LAWN CARE GUIDE:

Pesticide-Free Lawn Care – Farmington River Watershed Association – FRWA

## ADVICE ON NATIVE PLANTS:

Connecticut Native Plants | Facebook

## NURSERIES SPECIALIZING IN NATIVES:

Where to Buy Native Plants | [pollinator-pathway](http://pollinator-pathway.org)

## WHERE TO FIND PLANTS

It's hard to tell what a plant will look like when it blooms, so Bailey suggests that you find out by going on garden tours. "It's like doing open houses – you get ideas. And gardeners share tips and plants."

Roaring Brook Nature Center has a native plant garden, and Winters invites all to call and ask for a tour.

It's easy to propagate many plants via cuttings and rootings, and learning how is just a click away on the internet, Winters says.

When you do buy plants, remember they'll grow faster than you might expect. You'll soon be spreading them around your yard or giving them away.

### Some sources for buying native plants:

- Garden clubs hold plant sales in the spring.
- People give away plants on the Connecticut Natives Facebook page.
- Nurseries specializing in natives can be found on the Pollinator Pathway website.
- Your local nursery is likely to have a growing inventory of native plants, as they're hearing more demand from customers. "If you work with your garden center, they'll work with you," says Bailey.
- Big box stores sell some natives, but be careful to read the label. It should have the species name only, and not be followed with a cultivar name in quotation marks.

## FALL MATTERS, TOO

What happens in your garden in spring depends a lot on what you did, or didn't, do the previous fall. They're called leaves for a reason. Mow them into your lawn. Leave them in beds as mulch and insulation from the cold. "Rather than think of them as a waste product, think of them as a bounty," says Winters.

Contrary to popular belief, don't cut back perennials in the fall, says Bailey. "Insects overwinter in the stems and leaf litter. 85 percent of those insects are beneficial." Only remove what is badly diseased or visually bothers you, she says. "Do a spring cleaning, not a fall cleaning." ■



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# WEDDINGS 2022

## *Celebrations for Everyone*

By JANE LATUS

**W**eddings today are like fingerprints or snowflakes: no two alike, and each intriguingly, uniquely styled. There are only three rules: that it be a highly personalized event that reflects the couple, an experience that guests will remember – and that there are no rules. “A lot of traditions are kind of out the window,” says

wedding planner Roger Spinelli of RJS Event Designs in Watertown.

Where you marry, and that location’s history. Who attends, and how you invite them. Who takes part, and what you call them. What you eat, and how much trash is created. These are things couples care about.

What they don’t care for are bouquet and (especially not!) garter tosses, outdated gender roles, or anything cookie-cutter.

It looks like COVID-19 will have a lasting influence on wedding planning. “Micro-weddings,” sometimes followed by larger parties, may stick around, as couples find they enjoy having the people who mean most to them share the ceremony itself. That doesn’t mean large weddings are over. Saybrook Point Resort & Marina is again consistently seeing guests sizes up to 175, says wedding sales manager Danielle Bailey.

One COVID-19 adaptation likely to remain is live streaming. Castella Copeland and Chris Smith of Windsor are inviting 110 people to their wedding this summer at The Society Room in Hartford and expect at least an additional 100 to attend online. It’s a great option for those who live far away and those at higher risk from COVID-19. Copeland, a math teacher, says, “If I’ve learned anything from being a teacher and being remote last year, it’s how to do things online!”

Stephanie Sanzo and Kirt Paradis of West Hartford will stream their March wedding at The Riverhouse at Goodspeed Station in Haddam. “You don’t want to





Lynn Jutras and Dan Schoefer  
were married at Wright's Mill  
Farm in Canterbury CT. Photo by  
**Carla Hernández Ten Eyck**



put people in a situation where they feel unsafe coming,” says Sanzo.

Weeknight weddings are another pandemic by-product. “Before COVID, if you couldn’t book a Saturday night, it was devastating! Now, couples have learned you can have a stunning wedding on a Thursday night,” says wedding planner Lisa Antonecchia of Creative Concepts by Lisa in Hamden.

## IT’S ALL ABOUT THE COUPLE

Every professional we spoke with had the same answer to the question, “What do couples care most about when planning their wedding?” They all said: that it’s unique and reflects the couple.

“They’re creating weddings based on who they are and how they experience life,” says wedding planner Chelsea Suddes, owner of Pearl Weddings and Events in West Hartford. “One of the most creative weddings I was able to work on was at Chatfield Hollow Inn, for a couple that travels all over the world.” There was a Turkish lounge, a lemonade stand, and alpacas, and every table represented a location the couple had visited.

Chatfield Hollow owner Ken Metz says that particular wedding was memorable, as was a camp-themed one, with picnic tables, food trucks, and a chandelier that the groom made with a canoe and strung lights.

Spinelli recalls, “I did a Halloween wedding where the grooms dressed as a ghoul and zombie, and their guests came in costumes.”

Suddes remembers an exceptionally beautiful outdoor, May 1st wedding of a nature-loving couple. The bride was barefoot, the band played country-folk music, and the tent was clear-topped.

Priam Vineyards in Colchester had a wedding with 400 guests, plus elephants. Couples can stomp grapes for engagement or save-the-date photo shoots, but some choose to do it at their wedding.

Weddings don’t need to be elaborate to speak for the couple, though.

Merrily Connery, who with husband Michael owns Saltwater Farm Vineyard in Stonington, says “Some keep the ceremony and décor extremely simple. Others are much more elaborate. But they’re all looking for something unique.”

Couples usually start by choosing a venue with an atmosphere where they feel comfortable, a place with a character that suits their character.





## LOCATIONS WITH CHARACTER

Most ceremonies take place at the same site as the reception. Few are held in houses of worship anymore. Combined indoor-outdoor options are sought-after. There are many options in Connecticut, and here are those planners say are most popular:

**Rustic chic:** more working farms also host weddings, and some offer farm-to-table catering. Family-owned barns are also popular.

**Industrial chic:** these include Saltwater Farm Vineyard, which combines a refurbished airplane hangar with vineyard and water views, and The Knowlton, the refurbished Armstrong Manufacturing Co. in Bridgeport, with views of the Housatonic River.

**Mansions and estates:** “Lord Thompson Manor – that’s my absolute favorite. It is stunn-ing!” says photographer Carla Hernández Ten Eyck.

**Vineyards and breweries:** “Breweries especially have taken off,” says Antonecchia.

**Inns:** for most inns, weddings aren’t their sole business. Chatfield Hollow Inn only hosts weddings in May, June, and September – and it is booked far ahead. A look at their gardens gives you a clue as to why.

**Shoreline:** coastal locations like the Saybrook Point Resort & Marina are popular, and few. Antonecchia warns. “If you’re looking for a wedding on the Long Island shoreline, you’d better book it far ahead.”

**The beach:** if you can find one (most likely a municipally-owned beach), it will be beautiful, but remember it will also be windy, and possibly hard to hear the ceremony.

**Hartford City Hall:** popular for elopements, and its architecture makes for fantastic photographs, says Hernández Ten Eyck.

**Backyards:** always popular, but

especially so during a pandemic.

**Riverside:** there are serene views of the Connecticut River from venues like The Lace Factory in Deep River and the town-owned Glastonbury Boathouse.


**Parks:** Wickham Park in Manchester, Elizabeth Park in Hartford, and state parks like Kent Falls offer a wide range of atmospheres.

**Historic ballrooms:** these include Hartford’s G. Fox Ballroom and The Society Room of Hartford, Copeland and Smith’s choice for what Copeland calls its “old-fashioned romance.”

**Museums:** remember they aren’t just for art: Photographer Todd Fairchild of West Hartford shot a wedding in a hangar at the New England Air Museum. The groom was a pilot, and the museum houses a plane just like the one his grandfather flew in World War II.




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## AESTHETICS

Out are plain-old neutrals. In are:

**Bohemian neutrals:** think of grassy colors and textures, and organic colors.

**Cottagecore:** similar, but very flowery and evoking an idyllic rural style.

**Bridgerton style:** lush florals, mixed vintage furniture, candles, and coziness, inspired by the show of the same name.

**Saturated colors:** in everything that could possibly have a color, from flowers to linens to glassware.

Shiran Nicholson, owner of The Knowlton, says couples who are drawn to the venue “like the funky warehouse feel” more than the polished look of a country club.

All that said, there are no rules! Sanzo says that she and Paradis were quick at making these planning decisions: partly to keep the stress level down, and partly because they have another priority. “The flowers don’t matter, as long as we’re together after being separated for so long.”

## SOCIAL MEDIA IS PROMINENT

Registries and design ideas aren’t the only things the internet is handy for. Couples look for planners, vendors, and venues on sites like The Knot. They join Facebook groups specific to their locality, or to similar-minded interests like zero-waste weddings.

Increasingly, couples are organizing their event entirely online, including sending invitations electronically. Copeland and Smith are doing this on the site With Joy. “It keeps the cost down, and it’s very efficient,” says Copeland.

## PLANNERS AREN’T JUST FOR BIG WEDDINGS

Suddes has planned weddings for as few as nine guests. “Truly, people are looking to hire planners more often than ever, because they understand the huge amount of stress it can be and are looking forward to enjoying that

experience without stress.”

Antonecchia has planned elopements. There are even planners who specialize in them.

It isn’t about the size, she says. It’s about “creating an event that really speaks to them.”

Hernández Ten Eyck shot a wedding with more than twice as many vendors as wedding members. There were two brides and two friends, and: an event designer, photographer, cinematographer, florist, lighting designer, DJ/officiant, caterer, and a hair and makeup stylist.

## EVOLVING WEDDING PARTIES

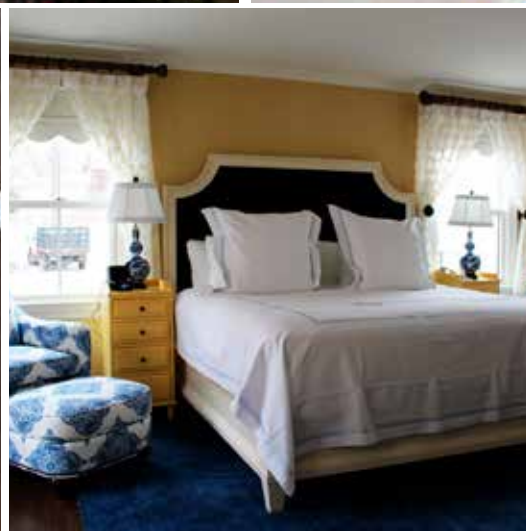
At many weddings, bridesmaids and groomsmen aren’t a thing anymore. More are mixed-gender “wedding parties,” and couples come up with their own names for the roles they want their closest friends and family members to play. “Person of Honor” is the new Best Man or Maid of Honor.

As for what those in the wedding



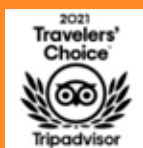


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parties wear: tuxes have been replaced by suits, ranging from blue to pink, and not necessarily matching.

Lookalike dresses are also less common now. Instead, women are wearing shades of the same color, in different style dresses or pantsuits that suit their body type and own tastes. Sanzo did just that for the women in her wedding. "It can be stressful to be asked to wear a specific color or style," she says.

## HARD-WON LOVE IS SWEETER THAN EVER

There are a growing number of LGBTQ-owned wedding providers in Connecticut. Word also gets around who in the business is an ally, like Nicholson, owner of The Knowlton, who when renovating the 1865 factory took extra steps to make it welcome to all, including installing gender-neutral bathrooms.

Sinéad Miller and Phoenix Hoang of Windsor chose Historic Events & Banquets (in the Hilliard Mills building in Manchester, where wool was spun for George Washington's inaugural suit) for their upcoming wedding. "We chose it because it's gorgeous – that's the main thing. Plus, it's LGBT-owned," says Miller. Hoang adds, "We really researched the places we were looking at," dismissing one that once held slaves. "We want a history, but a good history," she says.

Drew Angelo, owner of Historic Events & Banquets, plans weddings for all kinds of couples, but says LGBTQ+ weddings "feel different – the intimacy is different. The couple's chosen family is there. And they've been through more. There's more of an appreciation for the ability to marry."

When Halley Gmeiner, owner of Rose and Baldwin event planning, married her wife several years ago in New York state, she says, "I was sad we didn't have wedding vendors who were more attuned." So-called simple things, like forms asking for the "bride's" and "groom's" names, were so heteroexual-based that "I found in my wedding experience, my wife and I were not in the equation. Fluidity



is missing in the wedding industry – every couple is different."

## INSISTENCE ON SUSTAINABILITY

Planners say many couples are insisting on green weddings. Hiring companies to manage composting and recycling at the reception is just one part of that.

Suddes says couples ask for products that are biodegradable or recyclable. They want every item that's used – from seating charts to welcome signs – to be rented, or able to be reused or recycled. "We're always trying to be really creative so that every single detail has an intention, including its outcome, where it will go after use."

Graphic designer Kendra Meany of Lebanon, owner of Whole Weddings, designs custom invitations and every type of print material a couple might want, using plantable seed paper made from recycled paper, and printed with water-based ink. And people do plant them; they send her photos of the wildflowers and herbs they have grown with the paper.

Plantable seed paper is available online as well, but couples willing to spend a little more for customization seek out Meany – like the couple who met in math class and ordered a geometric-designed invitation for their Pi Day wedding.

## OFFICIANTS

Rabbis and ministers still occasionally officiate, but the most common officiant is a best friend. "It's such a

lovely personal touch," says Nicholson of The Knowlton.

The content of a ceremony is highly personal as well, with hand-written vows and readings from poems, books, or lyrics.

## "FOOD WORTH TALKING ABOUT"

"Food worth talking about – that is so important now," says Antonecchia. That includes drinks: you need a full-fledged bartender up for any request.

At Saltwater Farm Vineyard, Connery increasingly sees "roaming" weddings where guests don't sit for dinner.

Food trucks are replacing the buffet tables at many outdoor venues. At indoor venues, food stations are the thing, and are they ever varied – from raw bars to mashed potato bars. Vegetarians and vegans can enjoy themselves like never before.

Wedding cakes are still a cherished tradition – kind of. Many couples have a small "cutting cake," and they don't stop the dancing to slice it. But a "cake" might consist of dozens of cookies or cupcakes.

At the Priam Vineyards wedding of vineyard tasting room manager Christopher Barone-Flemke to retired NASCAR driver Ed Lemke, Jr. last October, the cake may have looked like cake, but was really – what goes with wine? – cheese.

Dessert stations are popular – and don't be surprised to find a wall of donuts. "Donut walls are the best!" says The Knowlton's Nicholson.





Photo by **Carla Hernández Ten Eyck**



Photo by **Carla Hernández Ten Eyck**





## WELCOME TO “WEEDINGS”

Now that it’s legal for recreational use, marijuana is making its way into weddings. This January, Hemp Mountain CBD of Vermont was at the Connecticut Bridal Show, showcasing marijuana products for couples and their guests to enjoy.

Miller and Hoang plan to incorporate marijuana into their day, with a “unity smoke” right after the ceremony. Miller says it’s their version of smashing a glass, lighting candles, or jumping the broom. “Cannabis has been important for us for health reasons, and it’s part of our culture.”

They’re calling it both their wedding and weeding.

## ENTERTAINMENT

Entertainment is as important as good food, says Antonecchia. She has arranged for roaming magicians, aerial scarf artists, jugglers, drag queens, and strolling human champagne-and-dessert tables.

“Rarely do you see a DJ alone

anymore,” as they’re usually accompanied by a sax player or singer, she adds. “And today bands that play weddings are truly magnificent musicians.”

The Knowlton offers an aerialist who hangs from a chandelier, dispensing champagne.

## JEWELRY

John Green, President and CEO of Lux Bond & Green says their designers work almost daily on custom engagement and wedding rings, using family heirloom stones or ideas that the couple provides.

“There is almost no limitation to what gemstones or metal a customer can use today,” he says. “Platinum is getting more important, yellow gold is making a comeback, and alternative metals are finding their place with wedding jewelry. Also, watches as a wedding gift is an important trend, which get worn daily like the rings.”

“One very interesting trend,” he adds, “is using shapes of stones that were not in vogue for several years. Combining shapes is a big trend, as well as using pear-shape and marquise-shape diamonds.

## THE COUPLE’S SENDOFF

The car might still be spray-painted with “Just Married” – but often the getaway vehicle at Saybrook Point Resort & Marina is a boat.

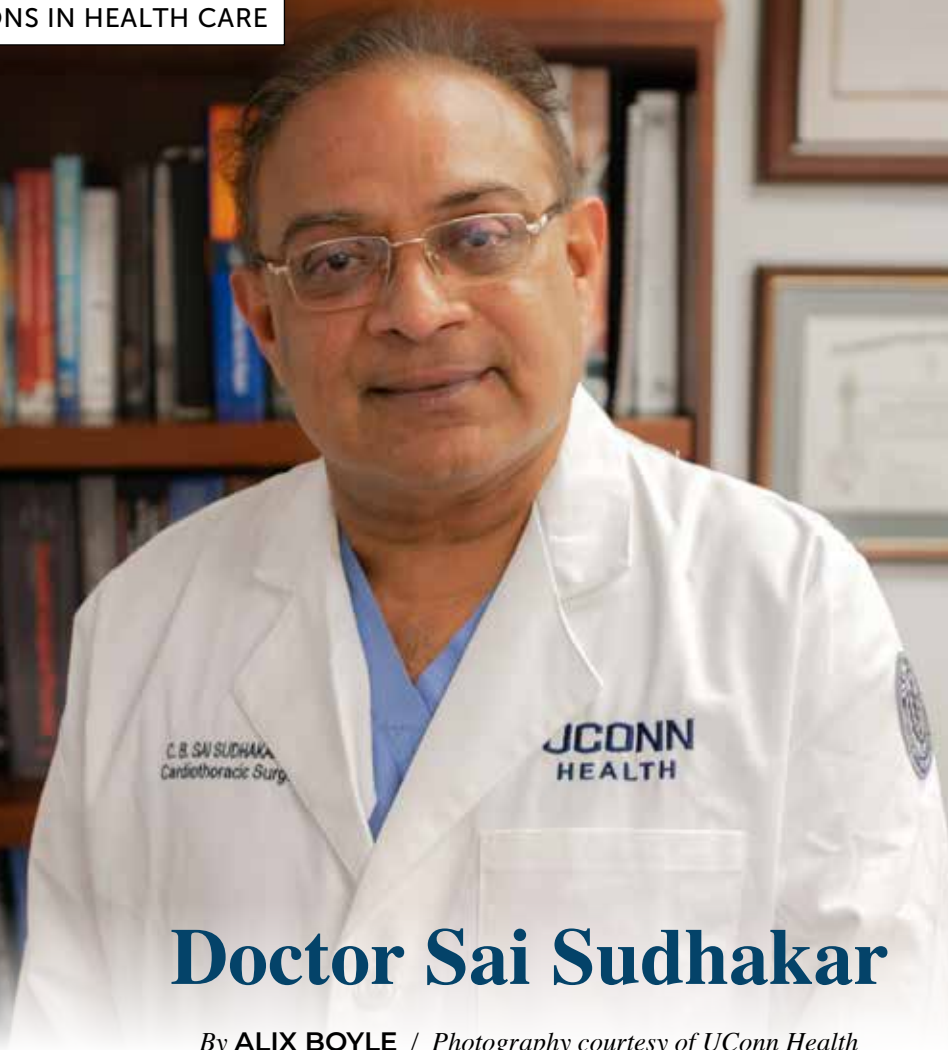
There are two schools of thought on the sparkler farewell. One venue owner says he’s thrilled they’re passé; another loves them and still sees them all the time.

Mostly, couples are focusing on saying farewell to their guests by providing food (or, at outdoor events, food trucks) as guests leave, offering sliders, espressos, wings, ice cream, pizza, or cupcakes.

But those guests are increasingly likely to be leaving the reception only to go to an after-party that the couple has arranged for them.

But the Most Important Person at the Wedding...

... Is the dog. Sometimes they’re Ring Bearer or Flower Dog, but more often Best Man or Best Woman. After all, who’s your best friend? 🐾



## Doctor Sai Sudhakar

By ALIX BOYLE / Photography courtesy of UConn Health

**G**rowing up in southern India, Dr. Chittoor Bhaskar Sai Sudhakar always wanted to be a heart surgeon. His career has taken him from medical school in India to training in England to a residency at The Ohio State University in cardiothoracic surgery and a fellowship at Yale University, also in cardiothoracic surgery.

Now, his home is UConn Health where, as academic chief of cardiothoracic surgery, he has big plans for the program, which offers adult cardiac services and non-oncological thoracic surgery. Traditionally one of the smaller programs in the state, Sai Sudhakar's vision includes research, educating the next generation of surgeons, and continuing to provide the superb personalized clinical care that UConn is known for.

Sai Sudhakar most recently worked at Largo Medical Center, part of HCA Healthcare's West Florida Division

where he treated severely ill patients with SARS-COVID-19, placing them on extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, (ECMO). He is reviewing whether it's feasible to bring ECMO to UConn Health. Besides SARS-COVID-19, there are other reasons for patients to go on ECMO, he says.

Additionally, Sai Sudhakar has served as chief of cardiac surgery and co-director of the Heart Institute at the University of Tennessee Health Sciences Center, chief and professor of cardiothoracic surgery at the Baylor Scott and White Medical Center in Texas, and associate professor at the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery.

His research interests include pulmonary hypertension secondary to left heart failure, mechanical circulatory support devices, heart transplantation, and heart failure secondary to SARS-COVID-19.

Dr. Sai Sudhakar recently spoke with *Seasons Magazines*. Here are some excerpts from the interview.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36



Dr. C.B. Sai Sudhakar (left) in the UConn John Dempsey Hospital operating room with physician assistant David Van Neil (UConn Health photo)

**Q: What's your overall vision for the department?**

**A:** Over the next couple of years, I'd like to recruit surgeons for cardiac and thoracic surgery and connect with physicians in surrounding communities to let them know about what we offer at UConn Health and UConn John Dempsey Hospital. I would like to increase our research efforts in heart failure and other areas.

Our fellowship is further down the road. It's a training program for the next generation of cardiothoracic surgeons. The fellows will receive mentorship and will learn the tools and techniques of surgery, but they will also learn how to be empathetic to patients.

Teaching hospitals -- hospitals that have training programs -- have much better patient-related outcomes.

**Q: What heart surgery procedures do you plan to offer in the future?**

**A:** In the near future, we are going to start a TAVR (transcatheter aortic valve replacement) with Dr. JuYong Lee, an interventional cardiologist here at UConn Health.

It's a procedure for patients who need to have a narrowed aortic valve replaced. We will insert a catheter into the groin and guide it to the heart and replace the valve. For several years, I have been part of a heart valve team.

We are also planning to offer thoracic endovascular grafting, coronary artery bypass grafting, mitral valve repair or replacement, aortic dissections, complex reoperations, and pulmonary embolectomy.

**Q: Tell me about a research project your department is working on.**

**A:** Dr. Yazhini Ravi, who directs the basic, clinical, and translational research for the division of cardiac surgery, is working in collaboration with folks from the University of Tennessee Health Sciences Center to gain insights into the cardiac pathologies associated with SARS-COVID-19 infection and is using a small animal model, to study the disease process at a highly restricted biosafety laboratory.

As we all know, COVID affects the lungs. However, it also affects the heart in all stages of the disease (mild, moderate, or severe disease) and more often in hospitalized and severely ill patients.

Dr. Ravi and her colleagues have developed an animal model to understand the cardiac effects of the virus on the heart. In addition, this model helps in the development and testing of therapeutics and vaccines and their affect the

heart and lungs. This will also help us understand and study the short-term and long-term effects of SARS-COVID-19 (long COVID). Because it's a new virus, there is so much unknown about its long-term effect on humans.

**Q: What did you learn while managing patients with SARS-COVID-19?**

**A:** It's so important to educate the public about the benefits of vaccination and vital that we follow guidelines provided by Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and take the appropriate precautions. There will be multiple variants of the virus coming in waves and it is important that we learn to live with it and take the appropriate steps to mitigate the spread of the virus in the communities we live in.

**Q: What should patients do to prevent heart disease and avoid surgery?**

**A:** To stay out of the operating room, people should exercise, eat a heart-healthy diet, and maintain good control of diabetes and hypertension. You should focus on modifiable risk factors, like smoking and obesity, for example. All these things accelerate heart disease. Weight control is one of the best things you can do for yourself.

**Q: What do you like best about working at UConn Health?**

**A:** On the hospital side, we have an excellent group of nurse practitioners and physician assistants who take care

of patients after surgery in the intensive care unit under the guidance of critical care physicians. It's a great team that delivers great care for our patient population. The access to care is superb, it's right here in Farmington, you don't have to go downtown. The team is invested in the well-being of patients and focused on delivering evidence-based health care.

On the academic side, it's a friendly environment, and I'm enjoying collaborating with other faculty members in UConn Health's Department of Surgery and the Pat and Jim Calhoun Cardiology Center, as well as The Jackson Laboratory for Genomic Medicine.

I'm grateful to Dr. Bruce Liang, (interim UConn Health CEO and executive vice president for health affairs and) dean of the UConn School of Medicine, and to Dr. [David] McFadden, Chairman of Surgery, for giving me the opportunity to participate in a leading research university and to develop what will be a top-notch program in cardiovascular surgery. ■

**"... People should exercise, eat a heart-healthy diet, and maintain good control of diabetes and hypertension. You should focus on modifiable risk factors, like smoking and obesity, for example. All these things accelerate heart disease."**



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# Lacrosse Throughout the Decades

## From Native American Beginnings to Adult Leagues

By ANDREW KELSEY

**B**eginning with the start of the game — its roots tracing back to Native Americans several hundreds of years ago — to the padded-player, televised version of the sport today, lacrosse has quite a history. Connecticut owns a notable piece of the game's timeline with the United States Women's Lacrosse Association having held the first women's national tournament right here in the Nutmeg State, in Greenwich, back in 1933 — several decades before the sport latched on at the high school level.

Connecticut has had college champions crowned and hosted

national championship games. It once had a professional team and boasts plenty of high school program powerhouses. It is a sport that continues to be enjoyed by adults in their 20s, 30s — and beyond — with adult league offerings and annual tournaments here in Connecticut. For those interested in adult league lacrosse and tournaments, there's no need to hang up the stick and cleats after graduation.

XCEL Lacrosse, based in Worcester, Mass., runs adult summer leagues in area states including here in Connecticut with men's and women's offerings at the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford. The Connecticut league began in the

summer of 2021 and plans to return and expand in 2022, according to XCEL Lacrosse owner Chris Widelo, who said there were approximately 80 Connecticut league players divided evenly by women and men each with their own league in the first year.

Widelo, 46, lives on Long Island and continues to play lacrosse. "We still think we can get out there and keep running with the young kids," said Widelo, adding that most of the league players both where he plays and in the XCEL program are 18 years old on up to those in their low 30s.

"It's a physical sport. It can be physically demanding, even at the recreational level," said Widelo, adding that the leagues limit the physical element as much as possible since many of the players are more focused on working careers and families and are playing mostly for fun and exercise.

Widelo said XCEL respects the tradition of the game that began with Native Americans many generations ago. "We do take it seriously. We try to be good ambassadors of the game they left us. It's exciting. It does have a rich history," he added.

Widelo's business partner with XCEL is Andrew Fink, head coach of the men's team at the University of Saint Joseph. Fink and Widelo both coached at Mount Ida College in Amherst, Mass., and led the team to several conference championships with their coaching tenures overlapping and the tandem coaching some of those title-winning squads together.

Fink built Saint Joseph's men's program and became its first coach when the program started in 2020.

Widelo and Fink saw an opportunity



Lacrosse has quite a history in Connecticut, and players continue to play the game even after graduation with adult leagues offered in the summer.





XCEL Lacrosse offers women's and men's divisions in West Hartford. The women's league teams consist mainly of players from 18 to those in their middle 30s. Photo by Karen Nell

to expand to West Hartford with several universities and high schools with programs in the area. “We thought it would be a great chance for players in the vicinity to play on Sunday afternoon,” Widelo said.

“It’s a close-knit community. There’s a great sense of community,” he noted, adding that in addition to his connections with Fink, players who join adult leagues often cross paths with former teammates or counterparts they have not seen in years. “The league offers a chance for collegiate athletes to compete in the offseason, as well as for those who have graduated high school or college and otherwise would not have an outlet to play the game they love,” adds Widelo, who played and later coached at Assumption College in Worcester earlier in his lacrosse life.

The XCEL Connecticut programs included five summer games for men and women, each costing \$80.

### Women’s Game

Karen Nell, is the head women’s lacrosse and field hockey coach at the University of Saint Joseph and runs XCEL’s Connecticut women’s program. “There are not many opportunities in the area for women to play lacrosse after they graduate from high school or college, and our adult league gives them that opportunity. Whether they are looking for an outlet from work, an opportunity for off-season training as college athletes, or just to continue playing the game they love, this is the place to be,” Nell said.

Last year, the women’s adult league athletes ranged in age from 18 to mid-30s and were mostly free agents or players who signed on to play individually and were placed on teams, according to Nell.

“We are hoping to draw more attention to the opportunity to play and have people form their own teams, but of course, free agents are always





welcome,” Nell said.

She did not play lacrosse when she was younger because it wasn’t available where she lived in New York. She went to Boston College to play field hockey and first learned about lacrosse while in college. “That was my first exposure to the sport which was a club at the time,” Nell said. “I have not played competitive lacrosse. I’m a student of the game and love the opportunity to be creative in teaching the game.”

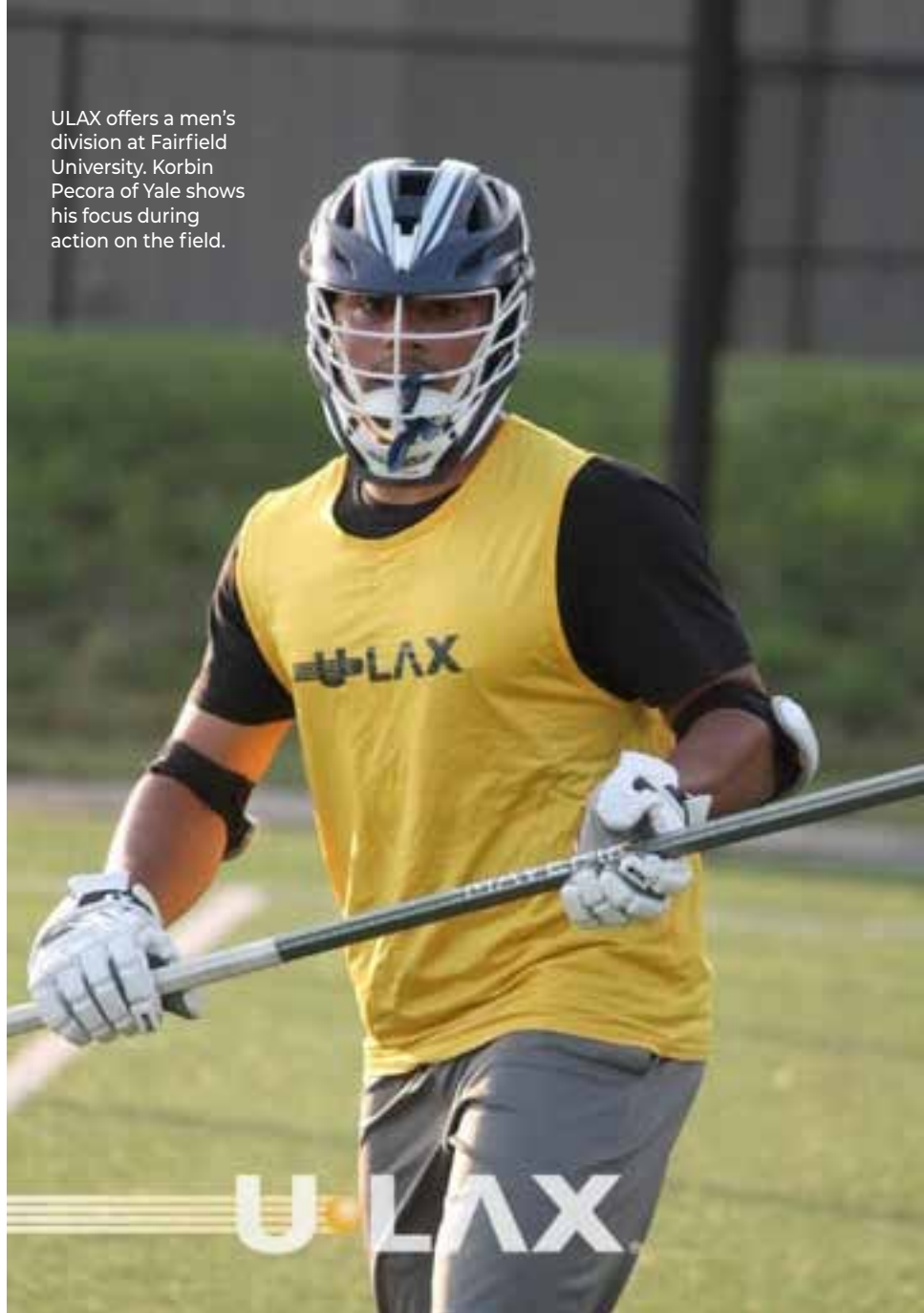
Nell has prior ties to Connecticut lacrosse; she was the head girls’ team coach at New Fairfield High School for seven seasons. Nell’s New Fairfield teams won three straight Class S State Championships from 2017-2019, and back-to-back South-West Conference Championships in 2018 and 2019. In seven seasons, the New Fairfield Rebels had a record of 124-32, and Nell was named Connecticut Class S Coach of the Year following the 2018 season.

After the 2018 season, Nell took the two head coaching jobs at the University of St Joseph, started the field hockey program, and started the process of building the women’s lacrosse program. She is also the director of the Girls Program at 3DLacrosse New England South, which includes select teams and offers lacrosse training.

### More Lacrosse Options

Colorado-based ULAX offers a men’s division at Fairfield University. “We’ve been hosting this particular summer league for about 10 years. We had 12 teams with over 300 players playing in the league last summer and expect similar numbers this summer,”

ULAX offers a men’s division at Fairfield University. Korbin Pecora of Yale shows his focus during action on the field.



Players battle near the goal during a game.

said Neema Kassai, co-founder of ULAX.

“In addition to the social aspect of the league, it’s a great way for players to continue playing the game they love in an organized/competitive setting. It also gives many college/post-collegiate players an opportunity to play with their former high school/college teammates. Players can join with a team, group, or as a solo free agent,” Kassai added. The ULAX program included six to eight games plus playoffs for \$135 last summer.

ULAX currently offers high school boys’ and men’s league playing opportunities but is interested in getting



high school girls' and women's leagues off the ground. For those interested, Kassai asks that they email [fairfield@ulax.org](mailto:fairfield@ulax.org).

Brittany Ross-Branche, general manager of Wide World of Indoor Sports (WWIS) in Montville, said WWIS plans to add adult league play in the future as it sees athletes transitioning up from the youth leagues to older levels of play. Ross-Branche grew up on Long Island where lacrosse is heavily ingrained in the culture.

The Glastonbury Lacrosse Tournament, which Widelo said is one of the bigger tourneys on the east coast, had its 36th year of competition for a variety of ages last summer.

### High School Lacrosse

In high school lacrosse, the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) has held state championships for boys since 1995 and girls since 2004. The sport has grown significantly for both girls and boys throughout the years with both expanding from two champs, one each in Division I and II to three in a trio of class sizes.

Joe Tonelli, who served as CIAC liaison to the girls' and boys' lacrosse committees from 2007-19, said girls' lacrosse became CIAC-controlled in 2004 because the sport met the criteria since at least 20 percent of CIAC member schools offered girls' lacrosse at the varsity level.

"In the first CIAC season of girls lacrosse in 2004 there were 55 teams and the CIAC Tournament had a two-division set up. By 2007, that number grew to 68 teams, and by 2011, the number of teams was approaching the 80 mark. At that time, based on the overwhelming support of the coaches, athletic directors, and school principals, the CIAC Girls Lacrosse Committee received the approval of the CIAC Board of Control to add a division and conduct a three-division tournament — Class L, M, and S — starting in 2011. Currently, the number of girls' teams is approaching the 100 mark, similar to boys' lacrosse, which is remarkable," Tonelli said.

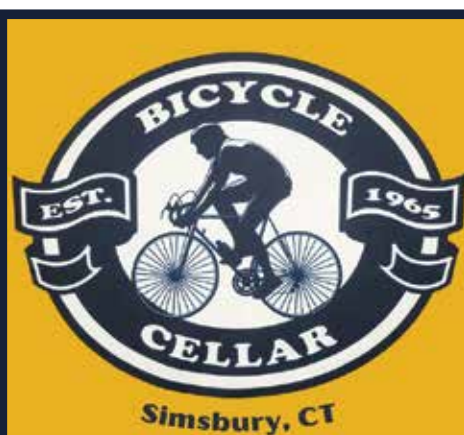
"Under the guidance of the CIAC Girls and Boys Sports Committees and the hard work of the dedicated coaches, athletic directors, school administrators,

and officials, the sport of lacrosse on the high school level in Connecticut has experienced excellent growth and increased interest, which has benefitted numerous student athletes," Tonelli added.

"I'm so encouraged with all the girls' lacrosse growth nationwide. It is a sport that requires players to have a strong mental approach to the skill aspect of the game that has to pair with their physical strengths to make a well-rounded player. The fastest and strongest athletes sometimes struggle with partnering the stick skills needed to be dominant," said Rob Troesser, head coach of the girls' squad at Masuk High in Monroe.

Troesser has coached at Masuk since 2013 and prior to that coached with Monroe Lacrosse Association's (MLA) youth program for a handful of years, beginning in 2009. Troesser's three older daughters are in the MLA youth lacrosse league.

"Lacrosse is a great field sport that combines stick skills, speed, and agility in a team sport that utilizes all of its players on the field. Some sports only focus on their top-performing athletes,



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but with lacrosse, everyone needs to pull their weight for the team to succeed,” Troesser said.

Fairfield County has been Connecticut’s hotbed for high school and youth lacrosse. Darien has won 11 girls’ state titles and 14 boys’ state championships. Wilton, New Canaan, Greenwich, Fairfield, and other southern Fairfield Country schools have also brought home titles and competed in title games on multiple occasions. Shoreline teams Guilford, East Lyme, and Branford have also been crowned girls’ state champs in recent years.

“High schools in Connecticut continue to add girls’ lacrosse to their athletics programs every year as the popularity continues to grow,” said Nell, adding that the Prep schools belong to the Founders League which started in 1984, and many of their programs have been in existence for more than 20 years.

Although boys’ lacrosse did not have its first state playoffs under the CIAC until 1995, the sport had been played at some high schools for a couple of decades before that.

Troesser points to wiltonlax.org for some interesting details on the history of the sport both at Wilton High and in the state. According to wiltonlax.org, in 1969, Wilton math teacher and football coach Guy Whitten was hired to coach the first school-sponsored team.

“Overall, 1974 was one of the most important years in Wilton and Connecticut lacrosse history. The Connecticut High School Lacrosse Coaches Association was born in Guy Whitten’s living room in Bethel, Connecticut. The Coaches Association chose Will Hunter of Conard High School as their first president and decided to sponsor the first Connecticut State Lacrosse Championship that Spring. After completing a 12-1 regular season, the Warriors beat Conard High School in West Hartford (9-4) to win the first State Championship,” according to the website.

According to the Wilton lacrosse website, in 1958: “Dan Cappal who played for legendary coach Milt Roberts at the University of Delaware and some of the students in his science classes at Wilton High School buy wooden sticks and ‘throw around.’ on a field outside of school. Al Dobseavage, Wilton High School Latin teacher and ex-lacrosse

player lends his support to the effort.”

Wiltons girls’ and boys’ squads both captured the first CIAC D-I state titles, and have combined to win nine CIAC championships.

## Division I NCAA Championships

According to the USA Lacrosse website, usalacrosse.com, NCAA held its first men’s championship in 1971 and first women’s national title game in 1982. Games at the collegiate and professional level are televised as the sport has grown in popularity.

Connecticut has had some recent championship success. Yale University won the Division I men’s NCAA title in 2018 with a 13-11 win over Duke; the pinnacle game was held in Foxborough, Mass. In 2019, Yale returned to the championship round and fell 13-9 to Virginia, in Philadelphia. D-I championship lacrosse returned to Connecticut itself in 2021 when Rentschler Field in East Hartford hosted the big game. Virginia edged Duke in a 17-16 thriller.

Rentschler Field was the host city for the D-II and D-III men’s championships as well; Le Moyne defeated Lenoir-Rhyne 12-6 for the Division II title, and RIT nipped Salisbury 15-14 in overtime to capture the D-III trophy.

Connecticut is home to another NCAA men’s team champion: The 2018 Wesleyan team which defeated Salisbury 8-6 for the D-III title in Foxborough, Mass.

The Connecticut women have made a mark as well with Trinity Hartford’s Trinity College, claiming the 2012 D-III championship with an 8-7 title game triumph over Salisbury at host Montclair State. Trinity went on to reach each of the next four championship tilts, finishing runner-up each time.

## A Professional Team in Connecticut

Connecticut was home to professional lacrosse for a brief time. When Major League Lacrosse (MLL) was founded in 2001, the Bridgeport Barrage was a charter member of the league. The Barrage played at the Ballpark at Harbor Yard for three seasons until moving to Philadelphia in 2004. Bridgeport’s team shared the field with the former Bluefish

baseball team of the Atlantic League.

The Barrage, after losing their first game 19-13 to the Boston Cannons, defeated the Chesapeake Bayhawks 12-9 for their first win. MLL merged with the Premier Lacrosse League in December of 2020. During Bridgeport’s brief tenure, the city hosted the Lacrossestar Game, the MLL All-Star Game — in that inaugural season, in fact. It was goals galore as the National squad defeated the American lineup 23-18.

## A Brief History of the Game

According to the USA Lacrosse website, usalacrosse.com: “Lacrosse is the oldest team sport in North America with the sport documented back to the early 17th century. Originating among various Native communities, with regional variations on how the game was played, lacrosse was played throughout modern Canada, but was most popular around the Great Lakes, Mid-Atlantic seaboard, and American South. Traditional lacrosse games were sometimes semi-major events that could last several days. As many as 100 to 1,000 men from opposing villages or tribes would participate.”

The USA Lacrosse writeup in the game’s history adds: “Modern-day lacrosse descends from and resembles the stickball games played by these various Native American communities. The modern field game most closely resembles that played among the Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois people, who also refer to lacrosse as the Creator’s Game.” It is unclear how many centuries ago lacrosse began, but it is known to be the oldest team sport in the United States.

According to a November 19, 2021 history.com article “The Native American Origins of Lacrosse” by Lesley Kenney: Lacrosse is America’s oldest team sport, dating back to 1100 A.D., when it was played by the Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois people, in what now is New York and areas in Canada bordering the state. 📖

*For information on adult league and tournament lacrosse, visit the following websites: XCEL Lacrosse XCEL Lacrosse | Men’s 18+ Summer Lacrosse League (CT); ULAX ULAX Lacrosse League - Fairfield County Men Field; and Glastonbury Tournament <http://www.gburlaxtournament.org/>*



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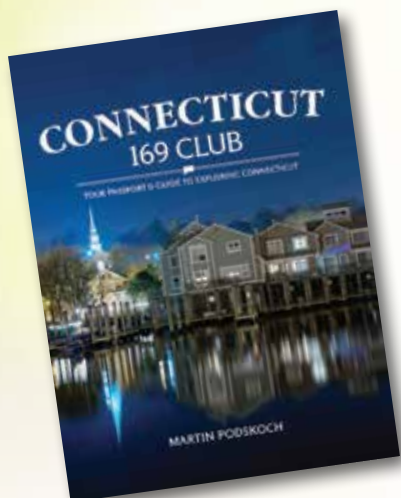
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DELICIOUS //







# Taco Tour of Connecticut

## 22 LOCAL TACOS TO TRY IN 2022

By AMY S. WHITE

There is much that can be said about the allure of the humble taco. Relatively cheap. Ubiquitous. Portable. Of endless variety. So satisfyingly delicious to almost every person's palate that "Taco Tuesday" is a thing. To help you celebrate every week, here are 22 of the state's best tacos to try in 2022. >>



*Note: This list was crowd-sourced, does not include chain restaurants, and does not follow any particular order.*

### Fuego Picante

280 Park Road, West Hartford  
Fire, indeed! What started as a food truck now has a spot in food-friendly WeHa. Run by a couple originally from Mexico's smallest state, Fuego serves traditional fare that is made from scratch. This includes the birria, or braised Angus beef, which takes ten hours to cook and for which Fuego is famous. Homemade tortillas are filled with beef, cheese, onions, and cilantro, then dipped in the fat from the braising liquid and grilled. They are served with consommé for dipping. **MUST TRY:** Birria Quesitacos. (If you haven't had these yet, social media insists that you do. Honestly. Go now.)

### Salsas 4 Taqueria

2434 Berlin Turnpike, Newington  
Simple and unassuming, this spot is located in a strip mall on the Berlin Turnpike. Tacos here are soft corn tortillas topped with cilantro, onions, salsa, and guacamole, or can be upgraded to the "supreme" version, which adds lettuce, tomato, cheese, and sour cream, and can be crunchy or soft. Fillings come in "selected" (including chicken, portabellas, chorizo, tongue, barbacoa) or "premium" (red snapper, shrimp, ribeye). **MUST TRY:** Short rib taco with grilled cabbage.

### El Pollo Guapo

1866 Berlin Turnpike, Wethersfield  
26 Front Street, Hartford and  
347 New London Turnpike, Glastonbury  
Billing themselves as a "neighborhood rotisserie joint," El Pollo Guapo currently has three locations. Not surprisingly, all their tacos are made with chicken. They can be purchased individually or as two-taco combinations served with rice or another of their delightful "side chicks" for an additional charge. **MUST TRY:** Bahn mi (sweet chili chicken diced cucumber and jalapeno, pico, and cilantro) taco combination with a side of cucumber salad.

### Sayulita

865 Main Street, South Glastonbury  
This place, once barely known, seems to be on everyone's radar these days. Although only a few tacos exist on the regular menu, creative specials are added regularly. As an added bonus, they carry more than 100 different tequilas/mezcal. But beware, they do not take reservations and wait times can feel as long as that liquor list. **MUST TRY:** Buttermilk fried chicken taco with bacon sautéed kale and maple peppercorn aioli.

### ATC South Street

3 West Street, Litchfield  
Associated with, but separate from, the popular restaurant @TheCorner, ATC South Street lures guests with its farm-to-table tacos made with fresh, local, seasonal ingredients. These tacos are as beautiful as they are inspired. **MUST TRY:** Japanese tuna taco with sesame-seared ahi, pickled carrot and seaweed slaw, sticky rice, kimchee aioli, and a nori wrap.

### Agave Grill

100 Allyn Street, Hartford  
Agave is a long-running restaurant in downtown Hartford across from the XL Center. Their regular and specialty tacos are plated and served with a choice of refried or vegetarian black beans and rice. If you're planning a Taco 2s-day party, they have taco kits available for purchase. **MUST TRY:** Agave Street Tacos made with blue corn tortillas, barbecue pulled pork, melted Chihuahua cheese, shredded cabbage, and pico de gallo.

### TJ's Burritos

3 Turkey Hills Road, East Granby  
Breakfast, bakery, lunch, dinner, marketplace, this place has it all, including tacos. In this case, you're in charge, using their choose-your-own menu categories: hard or soft corn taco, protein, cheese, and finish (up to four). So many possibilities! Three tacos come in each order. **MUST TRY:** Smoked chicken soft taco with Cabot cheddar, cumin-stewed black beans, sautéed peppers and onions, and jicama slaw.

### Moran

534 Middle Turnpike East, Manchester  
Moran is a gem, hiding in plain sight in a strip mall in Manchester. The restaurant started as a food truck, then expanded to this brick-and-mortar. It is mostly takeout, although there are a few tables in the small dining room. Every employee is a member of the family, who brought their authentic recipes from El Salvador. **MUST TRY:** Chicharron (fried pork) tacos topped with chipotle mayo, pico de gallo, avocado, mozzarella, and jalapenos.

### El Paso

6 East Main Street, Plainville  
For truly authentic Mexican tacos, this family-run restaurant is the place to go. In addition to the typical taco offerings of chicken, beef, and shrimp, El Paso offers more adventurous fillings such as tripe, beef tongue, and pig's head. Eat there, as the dining room is pleasantly colorful. **MUST TRY:** Cebeza de Puerco (pig's head) taco.



### Camacho Garage

36 Fountain Street, New Haven  
For contemporary Mexican street food in bright, fun, unusual surroundings, try this place. The chef's dad owned a garage in Mexico, and he has created a vintage garage theme for this restaurant as a tribute. The garage doors open up to an outdoor dining space. Local, seasonal ingredients are highlighted as well as gluten-free, dairy-free, and vegetarian options. **MUST TRY:** Duck confit taco.

### Sarapes

95 High Street, Enfield  
The Chavez-Mellado family has been offering up traditional Mexican cuisine at various iterations of their Serapes restaurant since 1999, and this location is their third. Having lived in various regions of the country, family history is one of the secret ingredients that go into every dish. While their chicken mole is the best around, their tacos still make the list. **MUST TRY:** Tacos de Carne Asada (grilled steak).

### El Camion

308 Sherman Hill Road, Woodbury  
Food truck-turned-restaurant, El Camion has a simple and straightforward menu: quesadillas, tacos, and burritos. Using locally-grown produce, their food is packed with big flavors. Have a special event planned? They offer a taco-truck party! **MUST TRY:** Fish taco, marinated in coconut milk and lime, crusted with cornmeal, topped with mango salsa.

### La Joya Fresh Mexican

834 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury  
The executive chef of Sayulita left there and took his passion and personal style to Simsbury where he opened La Joya. With a fast-casual approach and plenty of culinary experience behind the line, this "jewel" really sparkles. Beware that the dine-in and takeout menus differ slightly. **MUST TRY:** Citrus pork belly taco with apple jicama slaw and white truffle.

### Lucky Taco

829 Main Street, Manchester  
81 East Street, Vernon  
Now with two locations, Lucky Taco just gets more popular with time. One of the reasons for this is the sheer number of taco varieties on the menu, many of which are fused with other cuisines of the world. They often hold special events, and they also do catering. **MUST TRY:** Blackened Ginja Ninja Marinated Fish Tacos, with a ginger-infused IPA, citrus slaw, and cilantro crema.

### Taqueria La Grande

985 West Main Street, New Britain  
169 Park Road, West Hartford  
Another taqueria with two locations, at these you will find a menu of basic fillings but all are exquisitely seasoned. As an added bonus, they come with both red and green salsa, and that green salsa is as amazing as their homemade soft flour tortillas. **MUST TRY:** Chorizo taco.

### La Placita

173 East Main Street, Middletown  
This mom-and-daughter restaurant-and-market has a menu that changes daily depending on what's available. That's because everything is done from scratch, including the irresistible tortillas. Each bite possesses that made-at-home deliciousness, and customers are treated like family. **MUST TRY:** Lengua (beef tongue) taco.

### Las Tortas MX

Parkville Market, 1400 Park Street, Hartford  
Located in Parkville Market, CT's first food hall, Las Tortas is known for Mexican sandwiches known as tortas. However, around the market, their tacos are just as famous. Check out the rest of the market if you haven't yet. **MUST TRY:** Adobada (marinated) chicken taco.





### Taquerio

30 Broadway Avenue, Mystic

In a Mystic gas station converted into a bar, you will find Taquerio, a newcomer to the taco scene. Their tacos come in either “traditional” or “anything but traditional” types. A loyalty rewards program entices guests to return. Fill up at Taquerio! **MUST TRY:** Fried avocado taco with black bean puree, pickled red onions, green chili aioli, and cilantro on a corn tortilla.

### Rivas Taqueria

25 South Colony Road, Wallingford

Eating from Rivas is like eating street food in Mexico. Informal, straightforward, and authentic. Tacos are served in doubled-up corn tortillas with standard fillings (chicken, beef, pork) as well as more unusual offerings (tongue, pork stomach) and served with salsa and lime wedges. Don’t forget to visit the meat market while you’re there. **MUST TRY:** Tacos al pastor (grilled pork).

### Hot Taco Street Kitchen

As the name implies, this one is a food truck. It began in 2020 but has quickly become a staple at local vineyards, breweries, and WeHa’s Gastropark. If you do happen to see them while you’re out and about, definitely stop by. Or look for them online @hottacostreet-kitchen to experience bold flavors with Mexican and Asian influences. They also do catering! **MUST TRY:** Chicken BLT taco with chipotle aioli.

### Food Truck American and Mexican Tasty Flavors.

This food truck can usually be found on Summit Street in Hartford, where it has become renowned for its fresh and tasty offerings which include breakfast items. The menu changes often, and it is a cash-only business. **MUST TRY:** Shrimp tacos.

### Long Wharf New Haven Food Trucks.

If you have driven through New Haven on I-95, chances are you noticed a convoy of food trucks parked along the water’s edge known as Long Wharf. While this food truck paradise has plenty to offer, a large majority of them are selling Mexican food. The trucks and their menus vary day by day, with more appearing on weekends, but since you’ve read this far, you must be a taco lover, so go visit. **MUST TRY:** Pretty much any taco. These are the real deal.



Award-winning Chef Carlos Perez of Litchfield’s @theCorner and ATC South St. was kind enough to share the recipe for his Seared Ahi Tuna Taco, featured on our 2022 Taco Tour, so we can try it at home. *Thank you, Chef!*

## SEARED AHI TUNA TACO

Makes 4 Tacos

#### For the Tuna:

8 ounces sushi grade ahi tuna  
Black and white sesame seeds  
Salt and pepper to taste  
2 tablespoons canola, soy, or vegetable oil

1. Rub the tuna steak with salt and pepper, then place in sesame seeds to coat.

2. Heat a saute pan on high heat, place oil in the pan. Once oil begins to smoke, sear tuna lightly on both sides to desired doneness.

#### For the Japanese Vegetable Slaw:

1 cup daikon radish, julienned  
1 cup broccoli stems, julienned  
1 cup carrot, julienned  
1 cup cucumber, julienned  
1 teaspoon sesame oil  
1 1/4 cups rice wine vinegar  
1/2 cup sugar  
1 teaspoon salt

1. Prepare all vegetables by slicing them in long, thin strips (julienned). Once all vegetables are julienned, toss together in a bowl to combine.

2. Put sesame oil, rice wine vinegar, sugar, and salt in a medium sized sauce pan. Bring to a simmer over medium high heat. Pour vinegar mixture over vegetables and allow to cool.

#### For the Spicy Ranch:

1 cup ranch dressing  
2 tablespoons sriracha

1. Whisk ranch and sriracha together until fully combined.

#### To assemble tacos:

4 tortillas

Slice tuna in 1/4-inch slices. Heat up tortilla, fill with 1/2 cup Japanese Vegetable slaw, place two slices of seared tuna on top of slaw, then top with spicy ranch. Enjoy!



# PERFECT PAIRINGS

BY ALLEGRA TEDESCO



Making tacos at home can be such a fun way to get the whole family involved in preparing dinner. While the main course is simmering, here are some suggestions from our friends at **Simpson & Vail**, for iced teas that pair well with any meal. Homemade teas are not only crisp and refreshing, they're easy to make and can be sweetened by adding honey or colorful, fresh fruits.

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## Lemon Quencher:

This organic black tea blend brews to a deep copper color with a fresh lemon aroma and a smooth, refreshing taste. It's perfect for quenching your thirst on a hot summer day.

*Ingredients: Organic black tea, organic lemon peel and natural lemon flavor.*



## Moroccan Mint:

Transport yourself to a land of desert sands, caravans and palm tree filled oasis, with this delicious blend of organic spearmint and organic green tea. Traditionally, Moroccan Mint tea is served sweetened with sugar, although you can always substitute honey, agave, syrup or whatever sweetener you prefer. This tea brews to a golden cup with a smooth mint flavor.

*Ingredients: Organic green tea and organic spearmint.*



## Traditional:

Our full 1-ounce "Texas-sized" bags make it easy to prepare delicious, refreshing iced tea – perfect any time. This brisk black tea blend is made from orange pekoe and broken orange pekoe leaves that don't cloud when brewed cold, making it the perfect iced tea choice for you and your guests. With or without sweeteners, this traditional black tea is bright and refreshing.

*Ingredients: Black Teas*

## Brewing:

Put teabag in a gallon container. Pour boiling water over the teabag to cover, steep for 5 minutes then remove the bag. Add cold water to fill the container and stir. Refrigerate. Serve over ice as is or with your choice of sweetener.





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## Hiking Through History in Connecticut: A Lasting Legacy

By ANNA ZUCKERMAN-VDOVENKO

Black Dog of West Peak. Artwork by Ekaterina Glazkova

### PRESERVING NATURE'S LEGACY

As nature lovers explore the hiking trails of Connecticut with a bent toward history, they can't help but reflect upon more recent colonial events that took place within these forested pathways. Yet it is also important to think deeply about the ancient Native American history of this area founded by the first residents of our state. The term "Connecticut" means "beside the long tidal river," derived from the Algonquian word, "quinnehtukqut." Native Americans first blazed most of the present-day hiking trails as they hunted migrating animals.

These forested arteries then developed as trade and transport routes by the colonists thousands of years later as the early European settlers began to wrest away the land from those who originally resided here. Presently, those who live in the Nutmeg State of all backgrounds and nationalities have become passionate about curating the land, preserving the trails, and rebuilding those that need work. They are devoted to educating the populace that when hiking through state parks and recreational sites, people should keep in mind that this legacy is part of a great nation dating back 12,500 years, long before colonial settlers arrived.



West peak of Hubbard Park, Meriden after winter blizzard January 2022. Photo by A. Vdovenko



## LEGENDARY HIKES & TALL TALES

### THE HANGING HILLS HUBBARD PARK MERIDEN, CT

Historical trails throughout the state of Connecticut have become pathways weaving together folklore and legends of memorable tales, some taller than others. Our Connecticutians just adore a good story about the supernatural, as did their British, Welsh, and Scottish forbears famous for blarney, exaggeration, and fanciful imagination. Among all the historical trails in Connecticut, one of the most notable, charismatic places seems to be the Hanging Hills of Meriden.

The Hanging Hills border the Quinnipiac River, where Misery Brook and other aptly name landmarks stipple the dramatic scenery. Steep cliffs and mind-blowing views have inveigled nature lovers to this terrain with Jurassic rock-scapes. For over 100 years, hikers have told the strange tale of a lone, mute black dog, small in aspect, said to often appear on the trails near West Peak. Those who claim to have seen the dog describe it as a supernatural creature who supposedly leaves no footprints and remains completely silent as it travels along the ridges of Meriden's Hubbard Park. They claim it lurks on the trail and can be seen from the ridges here and there when you least expect it. What is particularly ominous about the spectral

creature is the ill-omen that goes along part in parcel with the sighting: "If a man shall meet the Black Dog once, it shall be for joy; and if twice, it shall be for sorrow; and the third time he shall die." These words were written up in a beguiling mystery thriller published in *The Connecticut Quarterly* of 1889, by W.H.C. Pynchon, grandfather of the celebrated author Thomas Pynchon.

In truth, Hanging Hills can be somewhat sinister as it craftily beckons nature lovers and geologists to its hazardous edges. Do you know anyone who claims to have seen the Black Dog of West Peak who also has an unshakable attachment and fear for this spot? I do... and have read many recent accounts of encounters with this mysterious creature on social media. Is this a case of a tall tale that people believe because the work of fiction that represents it is so palpable?

When visiting the Hanging Hills, be sure to feast your eyes on Castle Craig, a 32-foot-high structure resembling a turret from a fairy tale that Rapunzel would be proud to throw down her hair from. It looms over an expansive view of the Meriden cliffs from a vantage point 976 feet above sea level. A metal stairway on the inside of the turret permits hikers access to the outside observation tower. From there, one can take in the view of Long Island Sound, New Haven, and even the Berkshire foothills (weather permitting).

### MACHIMOODUS STATE PARK'S MYSTERIOUS NOISES MOODUS, CT

Nature beckons people to go hiking and bird watching on the beautiful woodland trails of Machimoodus State Park in East Haddam. But while you're meandering within this 300 acre Eden, be sure to keep your ears open in case you might hear unearthly strange sounds that have been emanating from the ground in this region for centuries. Those who lived at the foot of Mt. Tom found these unsettling, harsh noises to be mystifying. Local inhabitants once felt like they were victims in a horror story. When Native Americans occupied the lands at the intersection of the Connecticut and Salmon Rivers, they named the area Machimoodus which means: "place of bad noises." The startling sounds still come and go, quite mercurial, never too predictable. What could they be?

The Puritans mentioned having been plagued by groaning booms, vibrations, and furious sounds. Naturally, they attributed that to dark demons and devils in accordance with their folktales and religious fears. But they weren't the only ones bewildered for centuries. The Wangunk Indians, who had their fair share of these same terrors, attributed it all to their god, whom they hoped to appease with offerings. They believed that Hobomoko, who sat on a red sapphire throne underneath Mt. Tom, was the responsible party. Some said he was



Castle Craig. Photo by **Dominic Deeble**,  
Lined and Locked Photography



Sleeping Giant State Park, Hamden. Photo by **Paul A Moore**

angry over the invaders coming to take over the land. Or he could have been watching good and bad witches within the “hall” of his American “mountain kingdom” in their battles with each other. No one seemed to know for sure.

Now, modern science knows the sounds are caused by what they call “earthquake swarms,” tiny shallow earthquakes responsible for this entire hullabaloo.

### **SLEEPING GIANT STATE PARK, MOUNT CARMEL HAMDEN**

Sleeping Giant Park got its name first and foremost from the fact that the rolling hills above Hamden have an uncanny resemblance to a reclining giant embedded

into the hills when viewed from a great distance. The story of the Giant begins with a Quinnipiac legend of Hobbomock, a passionate character who taught his people how to hunt and fish, then departed to teach these skills to others. After many years, he returned and somehow became infuriated over the way his people were misbehaving. He stamped his foot down and caused the Connecticut River to suddenly divert to the East in Middletown after flowing South for over a hundred miles.

Good spirit Keitan came to the rescue by casting a powerful spell over Hobbomock, causing him to sleep soundly among the Connecticut hills. In 1735, the small settler’s community of Mt. Carmel was first built near a mill along the river near

Joel Munson’s dam. Later, a profusion of 19th-century back-to-nature painters and transcendentalist writers like Emerson and Thoreau created a renewed interest in the benefits of living among the mountains. Metacomet Ridge became home to summer cottages. A carriage road on the “Giant” gave rise to Blue Hills Park where John H. Dickerman’s road enabled visitors and locals to enjoy picnics on the high ledges.

On June 18, 1876, a 12-year old boy, Arnold Dana, fell off the cliffs at Sleeping Giant. Unbelievably, the boy lived and decided that since the giant was good to him, one day he’d be good to the giant. The Mt. Carmel Traprock Company started quarrying there earlier in 1912, but when the plan began to endanger the ridge (the



Barn Island. Photo by **Raymond Uzan**





Metacomb being asked to sign treaty by colonists. Artwork by **Ekaterina Glazkova**

Giant's Chin) with blasts, the beauty of the region was threatened. Public outcry took form as the Sleeping Giant Park Association (1924). A year later, a state park was established after the Sleeping Giant Park Association transferred the land to the state. The boy who fell off the cliff and lived became the president of the Sleeping Giant Park Association. His sincere efforts to preserve the giant resulted in silencing the quarry blasts on the chin and acquiring the lands in perpetuity, preserving the park for all to enjoy.

## STRANGE BUT TRUE

### THE LEATHERMAN'S CAVE- MATTATUCK STATE PARK- WATERTOWN

A cast of unforgettable characters has traipsed through the Connecticut highlands but none have captivated the imagination quite like the eccentric Leatherman who appeared in our state around 1860. For no apparent reason, from 1883 to 1889, this man clad in a heavy patchwork of leather scraps weighing 60 pounds trod a 365-mile

loop every 34 days between Connecticut and western New York State. That amounts to 11 times per year. He only halted on this circuitous route to eat and sleep. It is said that housewives could tell time by the moment he arrived at their homesteads asking for food at the exact appointed hour each month he was due in. Some have said he was basically a "walking calendar;" others now muse he suffered from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder caused by trauma. During his sojourn in Connecticut, locals gladly fed him and affectionately baked him fresh bread before saying goodbye until the next time. He had a circuit of caves where he slept, as he was never known to stay anywhere with a host. Quiet and nearly mute, he trod with a heavy backpack full of leather crafting gear, a wooden hand-carved pipe, and a French prayer book.

Rumors abounded as to the whys and the wherefores. Books have been written about him and first-person accounts of his appearance all over the state of Connecticut were handed down through generations. One story said he was a Frenchman fleeing



The Leatherman. Photo courtesy of Westchester Historical Society.

his country after heartbreak struck. Others said he was raised by a Native American Grandfather in Canada then made his way south after the passing of his French Canadian family. One thing is certain though; the Leatherman was a real person, although when you first hear about him, you can't imagine it could be true.

The most spectacular cave on his 365-mile loop at Mattatuck Park isn't so easy to access but accordingly, it is well worth the effort. At the summit, take in the breathtaking bird's eye view from Crane's lookout, the "penthouse" just above the jumbled mass of stones that gave the Leatherman protection from the elements. The blue-blazed markers point you in the right direction through the level and steep combination of the trail, but bring a map or app. to make sure you don't get off track.

In 1889, worried townsfolk in New York State discover that The Leatherman had passed away in one of his caves there, probably due to mouth cancer caused by his incessant pipe smoking. He was given an honorable burial, and although exhumed once due to the absurd amount of traffic caused by mourners and curiosity hounds, he now rests in Sparta Cemetery in New York State. His tombstone simply reads: The Leatherman.

### **WILL WARREN'S DEN/ RATTLESNAKE MOUNTAIN, FARMINGTON**

Along the 50-mile Metacomet Trail near Route 6 in Farmington, a 1.2-mile hike into the hills leads to a notorious hiding place. In the mid-19th century, Tunxis peoples occupied these high jagged cliffs, and already land altercations between the Native Americans and the settlers had been brought forward to the Connecticut General Assembly around that time.

Legend tells of a mysterious farmhand named Will Warren who sounds like a Huckleberry Finn kind of guy. He refused to attend church, spending his free time with the few Native Americans that lived on the outskirts of Farmington going fishing, hunting, and trapping. One version of the story is that the townspeople took objection to the notion Warren refused to attend church on the Sabbath and flogged him for blasphemy. Another, put forth by the Farmington Land Trust, tells that Will was a thief who stole some sheep and was whipped for it. He set fire to the village of Farmington in revenge. Will fled to what is now known as Rattlesnake Mountain, the enraged farmers hot on his trail. Two Native American maidens just

happened to be at the top of the mountain, where they ushered him into a sequestered cave, brushing away his footprints just in time so the villagers passed right by the small entrance to the cavern. Foiled again! Warren's cave is quite difficult to access for its narrow entrance points, one being of a vertical drop into the dark opening that reveals a secondary chamber amid massive boulders.

Not too terribly further along the Metacomet Trail is a place of great historical significance called "Hospital Rock." The flattened rock was near a smallpox hospital where patients who had been quarantined in the late 1700s could meet with their families during their recovery period. The rock is an archaeological site of great significance and deserves more formal protection. Approximately 66 names of smallpox patients were carved with great effort into the hard stone. Many are difficult to make out but others are quite clear and bear witness to the names of people from that time period who wanted to leave their memory for posterity. Pinnacle Rock is along the same trail, providing a sweeping 360-degree view of the valley below... time for the panorama setting on the smartphone.

### **SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL**

Speaking of the Devil, Connecticut nomenclature seems to have a penchant for the namesake with about 30 places bearing the name. In fact, you could have a picnic breakfast at Devil's Hopyard, take an inner-tube ride in Satan's Kingdom before lunch, go fossil hunting in Devil's Den Nature Preserve (to search for a legendary cloven hoof print purported to have been left by the Prince of Darkness himself), then head out to Spooky Hollow for stargazing. Perhaps the most popular of all these is a locale steeped in history and characterized by stunning mysterious formations below some waterfalls.

### **DEVIL'S HOPYARD STATE PARK- EAST HADDAM**

This state park offers swimming, hiking, birding, fishing and camping but also sports a colorful name difficult to forget. Acquired in 1919, the land features 1000 acres nestled within the Millington section of Haddam. The Eight Mile River's Chapman Falls entices visitors with its 60-foot drop over a Scotland Schist formation of stone steps. The power of the falls once ran Beebe's Mills, which operated until

the mid-1890s. During the Revolutionary War era, Dr. Beebe was tortured, tarred, and feathered for his outspoken loyalty to England. His colonial-era gristmill was damaged, and the stone was thrown into the river. Although there has been some controversy over the historical recounting of this incident, it is now widely acknowledged that the mill's grinding stone was cast downriver by a mob associated with groups such as the "Sons of Liberty." DEEP removed the millstone to prevent modern adventurers from trying to access it in a dangerous place for photos and dares. The broken stone now is on display in a permanent exhibition entitled: "American Democracy—A Great Leap of Faith" at the National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. This Connecticut millstone tells a powerful story highlighting difficulties colonizers had with each other during the Revolutionary War period as well as during the War of 1812. Violent groups backed those who would eventually espouse free speech and protection of personal property. Leaders for independence in higher realms considered people like Dr. Beebe collateral damage in their effort to achieve independence, but would later write up the Bill of Rights to prevent these abuses.

There are several anecdotes floating around as to how the area received its current name. Perhaps the most interesting is the tale related to the perfectly cylindrical potholes in the rocks that have developed near the spectacular falls. Some are inches in diameter while others are several feet wide. The early settlers believed that the Devil passed by the falls and got his tail wet. Infuriated, the demon hopped around boring holes into the rocks with his angry tail. Geologists now understand that stones moving downstream got trapped in the eddy of currents, spinning around to form the strange circular depressions. As the rock indentations wore down, they'd catch another and another stone within their scooped dish enlarging the formation each time.

### **CASTLES N' CAVERNS**

#### **JUDGES CAVE/WEST ROCK RIDGE STATE PARK-NEW HAVEN COUNTY**

Back in good ole' 1649 way before the Revolutionary War, fifty-nine British judges sentenced King Charles I to death, thereby dissolving the monarchy and placing Oliver Cromwell at the helm of the British nation. Charles II, son of the







Gillette Castle, East Haddam. Photo by **Kelly Hunt**, Cherish the Moment Photography.

executed king, was placed back upon the throne eleven years later. Vengeful, Charles II demanded that each regicide convict be hanged, drawn and quartered, a surprisingly popular but grisly punishment at the time. Three of those judges fled to North America. The newly crowned monarch sent his henchmen hot on their heels, so they hid in New Haven backed by sympathetic Puritans. As they began to fear recognition by royal informants amid the intrigue, payoffs, and shifting allegiances, they fled to a small natural cavern atop West Rock Ridge. According to the story, they survived on food scraps brought by sympathizers, but eventually after a time,

they encountered a panther, forcing them to flee the area and head to Massachusetts. The cave is named after the judges; the path leading up to their rocky retreat is called Regicides trail. The jumbled mass of boulders that comprise the cave entrance are emblazoned with a plaque which reads, "Here May Fifteenth 1661 and for some weeks thereafter Edward Whalley and his son-in-law William Goffe, members of the Parliament-General, officers in the army of the Commonwealth and signers of the death warrant of King Charles First, found shelter and concealment from the officers of the Crown after the Restoration. 'Opposition to tyrants is obedience to God,' 1896."

#### **HEUBLEIN TOWER AT TALCOTT MOUNTAIN STATE PARK SIMSBURY**

No article about Connecticut historical hiking trails would be complete without mentioning Talcott Mountain State Park and recommending a visit to see Heublein Tower. Talcott Mountain was named after John Talcott, the founder of Hartford. The Heublein Tower we see today is half castle, half lookout, a one-time summer residence for the family of Gilbert Heublein, the son of a wealthy Hartford immigrant from Germany. One day, during his courtship, Gilbert went hiking with his fiancé in the Talcott Mountains. Atop the peak, feeling





Heublein Tower, Simsbury. Photo by **Joe Cooper**, istockphoto.com

amorous, he vowed to build her home there someday. The monolithic marvel that came to fruition became Heublein's prestigious private residence. Inside, there are luxury bedrooms and a ballroom on the 6th floor where the lookout viewing area is today. Heublein was a successful businessman having founded a Hartford Hotel, and later with the zest of a true entrepreneur, he began manufacturing A-1 Steak Sauce.

Today "The Heublein" presides over the Farmington Valley. You get there by taking a somewhat steep hike with stunning lookouts along the way. On a clear day, 'you can see forever,' as the song goes, and this applies perfectly to the top of the mountain, especially when the Tower is open to the public. You may find yourself short of breath climbing the inside stairs to get to the top, but since you've gone so far, it's a must to access the viewing area when possible. Due to COVID-19, the Tower has been open and closed to the public at various times, but no matter when you go, it is enough to simply get there and to enjoy the exterior architecture completed in 1914. Look for musical festivals at the

Tower such as the upcoming August "Hike to the Mic" event the the "Tower Toot" where musicians come to play all day long as vendors cook up sausages and other tasty treats for hungry music-loving hikers. The Friends of Heublein Tower have worked hard together with the Department of Environmental Protection to ensure the property and surrounding forests are well cared for, while ongoing plans for continued restoration of the Tower remain high on the list of priorities.

#### **GILLETTE CASTLE STATE PARK- EAST HADDAM/LYME**

The early part of the 20th century was a good time to build castles in Connecticut, apparently. William Hooker Gillette was the son of prominent Hartford elites as well as wearing the hat of actor, playwright and inventor. He began building his castle in 1914. His home still presides over a large estate and closely resembles a medieval castle of complex stone walls, turrets, artisan woodcarvings and unique furnishings. It took 25 men over five years to complete this architectural fantasy world.


Now protected as a State Park, surrounding pathways wind through woodland trails that stretch over Gillette's private train trestles, into caves, along near-vertical rocky steps, and past stone arched bridges. Situated on a hill above the Connecticut River, the Castle has a bird's eye view of the natural banks characterizing the waterway. The Connecticut River is the only major river in the Northeast that doesn't have a well-developed town at its' mouth or extensive commercial development due to extensive shifting sandbars. The eagle-eye vantage point from the Castle's cliffs give one a sense of how things looked 100s of years ago. And isn't that brief foray back in time part of what we all love to see when hiking in our state?

#### **HEROES AND THEIR JOURNEY**

##### **BARN ISLAND-STONINGTON**

This extraordinary place is full of well-maintained hiking trails, lush meadows, sandy beaches, tidal marshes, rocky coastal uplands, and forests. The enchanting





coastal landscape engages naturalists and hikers where deep orange dusky evenings abound with birdlife. Barn Island seems to transcend space and time. The wetlands are perhaps the finest in the state according to the late William Niering, author and renowned Connecticut College botany professor. But besides their natural splendor, this place witnessed history in the making back in the 18th century when former slave Venture Smith had a chance to start his life anew by making Barn Island his home.

Captured by slave traders in Africa as a 7-year old prince, Venture Smith, formerly Broteer Furrow, saw his well-respected father brutally tortured and killed for refusing to reveal the hiding spot of the villager's monies they accrued from trade. Forced to march days on end to the coast, Broteer was soon separated from his mother and his once close-knit family. The African prince was then sold to work on a ship heading for Rhode Island as a servant. The price paid for the brave 6-year-old child was 4 bottles of whisky and a piece of calico. In 1739, Broteer (later known as Venture Smith) arrived in the colonies where he spent untold years working his way out of bondage while toiling for farmers on Barn Island and Fisher Island across the Sound. He was a legendary personage of strong build and unshakeable determination who later built his own homestead farm on Barn Island.

Broteer worked double duty farming and chopping wood until he became prosperous enough to purchase his wife and family

from slavery. He bought other countrymen and freed them as well, although many some whose freedom he bought betrayed him with theft and promises not kept. Through all this, Broteer maintained his dignity, honesty, and work ethic. His word, once given, could always be counted upon, and his charisma was so compelling that even the harsh slave owners made allowances for his requests. His family was eventually settled in East Haddam where he wrote his memoir before passing away in 1805. His thoughtful memoir is considered one of the earliest works by a former African forced into slavery. He said: "My freedom is a privilege that nothing else can equal." Venture's adventures and exploits are highlighted in an exhibit at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. When you walk along the trails of Barn Island, be sure to stop for a moment of silence to reflect on this heroic man of courage who bought his freedom then went on to free many others.

The Stonington Historical Society Lighthouse will be featuring a Venture Smith Exhibit this spring that hikers can go visit after a day on the trail.

#### **PACHAUG STATE FOREST – NEW LONDON COUNTY**

Pachaug State Forest and the river that runs through it once teemed with historical intrigue, war, and betrayal. Now, it is home to countless trails that wind throughout the Eastern portion of the state stretching all the way to Rhode Island. Connecticut's

expansive state park was originally established in 1928 with 1,011 acres of land purchased from the Briggs Manufacturing Company in Voluntown. This old town was named for the volunteers in the 1675 wars who stayed to fight the Native Americans. Pachaug State Forest, located in New London County, spans 26,477 acres in six towns, being the largest state forest in Connecticut.

The word "Pachaug" is a Native American term that means "bend or turn in the river. From nine miles at the Beach Pond source of the river to its junction at the Quinebaug River, the Pachaug River traverses twice that distance while winding through the varied landscapes. In 1973, the Pachaug-Great Meadow Swamp received the National "Natural Landmark" designation, now considered one of the finest Atlantic white cedar swamps in our state.

Before the colonists arrived, Pachaug Forest was the tribal land of the Pequot, Mohegan, and Narragansett, people. One of the great Native American leaders at the time, Wampanoag Sachem Metacom, also known as Metacombet or "King Philip," (the name given to him by the English) led an uprising. Metacom took a British name and at times wore Western-style clothing to improve relations with the British while attempting to make sure the colonizers honored territorial treaties. However, war became inevitable in response to the expansion of colonists into sacred territory, a fact that deeply disheartened and infuriated the Wampanoag, Nipmuck, Pocumtuck, and Narragansett tribes. King Philip's War (1675-1676) was the last major endeavour by the Native Americans of this region to expel the English settlers who were breaking treaty provisions. A devastating, bloody conflict arose when the Mohegan, Pequot, and Nauset tribes joined with the colonists. One out of ten soldiers on both sides died. John Alderman, the Native American soldier who fought alongside the colonizers, shot and killed King Philip on August 20, 1676. The bloody 14-month-long war ended with the death of Chief Metacom. Beheaded, drawn, and quartered, Metcom's head was placed on a spike and displayed for 2 decades in Plymouth. Many hundreds of colonists had died and their settlements had been destroyed. But thousands of Native Americans had also been killed; colonizers decimated the Wampanoag, the Narragansett, and other smaller tribes. King



Venture Smith, Artwork by Ekaterina Glazkova



Philip's war fought on these lands ended much of the Native American resistance in Connecticut, leading the way for more English settlers to occupy lands previously granted by treaty to the earliest residents of the land. Many captives were sold into slavery as prisoners of war.

## SO, WHO'S LAND IS IT ANYWAY?

While hiking through the stunning trails of Connecticut one fine day, you might find yourself cheerfully humming the Woodie Guthrie song "This Land is Your Land," that popular folksong many learned in grade school. But when Guthrie intoned: "This land was made for you and me," perhaps he had, a certain blind spot within his thinking process.

There is truly a sense among New Englanders nowadays of a deep apology and regret for how some of the early settlers affected the Native Americans. War, pestilence, and the introduction of strong alcohol in trade and bribery took a terrible toll. But if you refocus your lens just slightly, you will know that the Native American spirit is here in our hills everywhere for eternity, from the paths they first blazed to the many people living in our state of all backgrounds that proudly claim heritage with Connecticut's first occupants.

We remain a state with countless rich layers of history here in the forests of Connecticut, from modern-day folktales and colonial lore to Paleo-Indian legends. All these compelling stories can't help but fascinate hikers in their Patagonia jackets with Eddie Bauer backpacks, reminding them of who once walked here and developed this land to begin with.

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# Take Your Child to Work Day Is a Total Farce

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

**I**t's 7:30 PM on the fourth Wednesday of April. You've just given your child their nightly bath, and you're now reading them their favorite story. Something about a pigeon and a hot dog or dinosaurs and underpants. Your child is buzzing with excitement because tomorrow is the fourth Thursday in April, and that means one thing:

Your child will not be climbing aboard the school bus the next day. Instead, your little one will be going to work with you. It is, once again, Take Your Child to Work Day.

You and your child are so excited.

This moment in time, as you switch off the light and say goodnight to your

precious child, will also be the pinnacle of Take Your Child to Work Day. It will not get any better than this.

In fact, from here until the end of the workday tomorrow, life will be hell.

It was a noble idea when Take Your Child to Work Day was initially conceived in 1992. Back then, it was known as Take Our Daughters to Work Day, though sons were often included and officially added in 2003. The purpose of the day is to give children in the United States a glimpse at the working world, which sounds lovely and important but is in practice horrendous and stupid, for several reasons.

First and foremost, the workday does not cease to be a workday for the

beleaguered parents who bring these small human beings to the workplace, which means that after the novelty of watching their parent respond to email, operate a drill press, or bake loaves of multigrain bread has worn off, the parent is left with a child who is bored to death yet still tragically underfoot.

Goodbye productive workday. Hello to managing the emotions of a child who has been deprived of recess and snack time.

Suddenly, the role of childcare worker has been added to the parent's already plateful of responsibilities for the day, making doing the actual work required frustrating if not impossible.

If the parent is fortunate enough to



work for an employer who has decided to be proactive about this unfortunate, ridiculous day, your child will perhaps receive a tour of the workplace, which, depending on its size of the facility, might offer a brief respite of 15 or 30 minutes. Maybe some swag will be offered to the child in the form of an oversized tee-shirt, a pen stamped with the logo of the company, and maybe some stationary.

If the parent wears an ID badge throughout the workday, perhaps name badges have been made for the children as well.

That will fill at least 45 seconds of the day.

Then, the children will likely be collected in some conference room or lunchroom or storage closet, where they will be invited to color for the next seven or eight hours. Or staple papers. Or maybe bend paperclips into sculptures. Basic office supplies will be thrown at the child in a desperate attempt to keep them occupied and quiet.

Except for lunch, of course. For the parent, lunch is typically the sole escape from the daily grind of the workday, but on this day, lunch will be spent with the child, who will embarrass the parent with boring, repetitive stories, inane, endless questions, and desperate pleas for anything and everything inside the vending machines.

Take Your Child to Work Day should be renamed Make Your Workday Even More Unbearable Than Ever Before Day.

All of this is disastrous, of course, but it's not even the primary crux of the problem. The real issue is this:

Why give happy children a view of the soulless American workday? Why demoralize these younglings any more than necessary? What heartless villain thought that offering them a glimpse into the next 40 years or so of their lives any sooner than

**"Take Your Child to Work Day" is work. Only worse. In fact, it's more work, for both the parent and their newly disillusioned child.**

necessary was a good idea?

Kids aren't stupid. Give them 15 minutes in your average workplace and they'll be silently begging for a return to the joys of a classroom, filled with friends, lessons designed to engage curiosity, and play.

School rules. Work sucks. Why clue our children into this sad reality while they are blissfully busy enjoying their childhood?

What's next? Take your child to hip replacement rehab?

Take your child to the mortgage payment processing center?

Take your child to a facility that produces medication for erectile dysfunction and high cholesterol?

Why not take your child to the local cemetery? Maybe let the little scamps pick out a future plot for themselves under the shade of a dying oak tree?

Or better yet, instead of Take Your Child to Work Day, how about Take Your Parent to School Day?

Would any adult be opposed to returning to a brightly colored classroom of elementary school for a day of reading books, writing stories, playing kickball at recess, and passing notes behind the teacher's back?

The kids don't need a glimpse at the

workplace. Adults need a reminder of a time when life was happy and good.

Take Your Child to Work Day was designed with noble intent, and I have no doubt that some workplaces are better than others. If you work at an amusement park, for example, I suspect that this day works out quite well for you. Ditto for places like the zoo, the trampoline park, the movie theater, Ben & Jerry's, and the pet store.

Truthfully, given that I'm an elementary school teacher, it's worked out quite well for me, too. Taking my children to school with me has meant that they enjoy a day of school, filled with novelty and fun but absent of any academic responsibilities.

They experience the best of the school day minus anything that might tax the brain. And best of all, no homework at the end of the day.

But other than the teachers, zookeepers, and professional ice cream tasters of this world, most workplaces are not well suited for Take Your Child to Work Day, making this a far less joyous and noble celebration than originally intended.

In other words, Take Your Child to Work Day is work. Only worse. In fact, it's more work, for both the parent and their newly disillusioned child.

Maybe call in sick on Take Your Child to Work Day this year and teach your kiddo the joys of telling your employer that you've fallen ill when you're really healthy as an ox.

That's a lesson they might actually appreciate. ■

*Matthew Dicks is an elementary school teacher, bestselling novelist, and a record 55-time Moth Story SLAM champion. His latest books are Twenty-one Truths About Love and The Other Mother.*

*Sean Wang, an MIT architecture graduate, is author of the sci-fi graphic novel series, Runners. Learn more at [seanwang.com](http://seanwang.com).*

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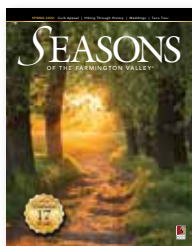
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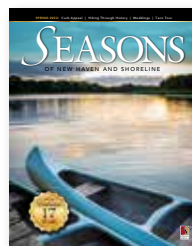
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