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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 TheaterWorks in Hartford, a modern theater that continues to change, evolve, and innovate to bring entertainment to Connecticut residents.

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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“SPRING: A LOVELY
REMINDER OF HOW
BEAUTIFUL CHANGE
CAN TRULY BE.”

- Unknown





Sara Tabtabai, M.D., FACC

By **MARGARET BURKE** / Photography by **STAN GODLEWSKI**

Trinity Health Of New England welcomed Sara Tabtabai, M.D., FACC, to their staff as the Regional Director of Heart Failure and Population Health in early 2021.

Heart failure is a disease that occurs when the heart is unable to adequately pump enough blood (which contains oxygen) to maintain the body's metabolic needs. It can be caused by damage to the heart from heart attacks, infection, or poorly controlled high blood pressure, among other things. Individuals who progress to advanced stages of heart failure may require a heart transplant.

Dr. Tabtabai's goal in her new role is to extend the successful model for heart failure care, established as part of the Hoffman Heart and Vascular Institute at Saint Francis Hospital, out to the other sites within the Trinity Health Of New England system. This regionalized approach to care will enable individuals diagnosed with heart failure to receive the quality care that the Saint Francis program is known for closer to home.

Dr. Tabtabai explains that the model at Saint Francis is a multidisciplinary program that cares for a large number of patients, with approximately eight hundred discharges per year. The goal of the heart failure program is to improve patient outcomes and reduce hospital readmission rates. Hospital readmission is a marker of poorly controlled disease. She points out that the Saint Francis program's readmission rates are lower than the national average. "That is a metric that we're proud of and is a prime example of the quality of care we provide," she says.

Dr. Tabtabai's first step toward regional expansion has been to develop a heart failure clinic at Saint Mary's Hospital in Waterbury, another member of Trinity Health Of New England. She spent the first 10 months

of her tenure developing a business plan, building a multidisciplinary care team, and mapping out processes for the clinic. The clinic officially opened in November 2021.

Dr. Tabtabai says, "Our goals to enhance access to high-quality heart failure care include providing additional satellite clinics within the communities that we serve." In addition, she is working towards growing a Ventricular Assist Device (VAD) program. Ventricular Assist Devices help patients with more advanced stages of heart failure. She expects this program to roll out within the year.

CONNECTICUT ROOTS

Dr. Tabtabai grew up in Shelton, Connecticut where she says, "I had an interest in physiology and helping people, even in high school." She pursued these interests by learning CPR and becoming a lifeguard. In college, she decided to pursue a career in medicine. She completed a Bachelor of Science degree in behavioral neuroscience at Northeastern University in Boston. She explains that at the time Northeastern did not offer a specific pre-medical track but a degree in behavioral neuroscience served her interests and provided her with the prerequisites for medical school.

She opted to be near her family and attended the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. She notes that she tried to keep an open mind in medical school (and her internal medicine residency) as to what medical specialty she may want to pursue, though always held an interest in cardiology. Her interest in the physiology of internal medicine continued but she also very much liked obstetrics and gynecology.

It was during medical school that she gained significant exposure to the care of people with heart failure. As a medical student, she was able to shadow



Sara Tabatabai, M.D., F.A.C.C.,
Regional Director of Heart
Failure and Population Health;
Director, Women's Heart
Program, Saint Francis Hospital

Richard Soucier, M.D., a cardiologist who, at that time, was integral to the initial development of the Saint Francis Heart Failure Program, during his clinics. She was also involved in some of his research activities creating a full circle moment upon her return Saint Francis Hospital and Trinity Health Of New England re-joining Dr. Soucier, who is now Trinity Health Of New England's Regional Cardiology Physician Executive and Chief of Cardiology at Saint Francis Hospital.

After medical school, Dr. Tabtabai went on to complete a 3-year internal medicine residency at Massachusetts General Hospital where her interest in cardiology continued to evolve. She stayed on at Massachusetts General Hospital to complete a 3-year fellowship in cardiology followed by a 1-year fellowship in Advanced Heart Failure and Transplant. Dr. Tabtabai is board certified in cardiovascular disease, internal medicine, and advanced heart failure and transplant.

Dr. Tabtabai met her husband while in medical school. His family is also from Connecticut so "we decided to stay in New England to be near family." They have three children between the ages of 7 and 2 who keep them busy and happy outside of work!

WOMEN AND HEART DISEASE

Dr. Tabtabai has been able to combine her interests in cardiology and women's health. She explains that when cardiology as a field of medicine first started to focus on cardiovascular disease, it was thought to be mainly a disease of men. Because early studies did not include enough women, there was very little data or information about the effects of cardiovascular disease on women. Over time, however, there has been a realization that women are also affected by this disease and that the disease process and risk factors associated with it may not be the same as it is in men.

Dr. Tabtabai adds, "We're coming to realize that there may be an early sort of window into a woman's cardiovascular health later in life during pregnancy. Women who have adverse pregnancy outcomes like high blood pressure or diabetes during pregnancy or preeclampsia may be at higher risk for developing cardiovascular disease later in life." This presents an opportunity for a woman to modify her behaviors and lifestyle to minimize her risk of cardiovascular disease later in life.

This knowledge led to the development of a Women's Heart Program even before Dr. Tabtabai joined Trinity

"We're coming to realize that there may be an early sort of window into a woman's cardiovascular health later in life during pregnancy. Women who have adverse pregnancy outcomes like high blood pressure or diabetes during pregnancy or preeclampsia may be at higher risk for developing cardiovascular disease later in life."

Health Of New England. She describes it as a very community-facing and collaborative program. It coordinates with the Comprehensive Women's Health Center at Saint Francis to provide multidisciplinary services to women ,including cardiovascular health. Expanding this model of care to women across the region is also one of Dr. Tabtabai's goals in her role as Regional Director.

LOOKING FORWARD

Dr. Tabtabai says that she and her colleagues are looking forward to re-engaging with the community on a more in-person level through both the Heart Failure and the Women's Heart programs once it becomes safe to do so. She notes that the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of telehealth and remote monitoring of patients with heart failure. These tools will continue to be used to benefit patients but she looks forward to getting back to more in-person interactions with her patients. ■

Margaret M. Burke, Pharm.D., BCPPS, is a freelance medical writer with more than 25 years of clinical pharmacy experience, including board certification as a pediatric pharmacotherapy specialist. She lives in Manchester.

Stan Godlewski is an editorial, corporate and healthcare photographer based in Connecticut and working primarily between Boston and New York City.

A man with a beard and a young child are playing drums together in a kitchen. The man is holding a drumstick and the child is also holding a drumstick. They are both smiling and looking at each other. The background shows a window and some kitchen items.

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Buying, Selling, and Rising Interest Rates

By TERESA M. PELHAM

Following 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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TheaterWorks Hartford:

Independent, Innovative, and Ever-Evolving

By FRANK RIZZO / Photography courtesy of TheaterWorks Hartford

It was a triumphant autumn in 2019 when TheaterWorks Hartford reopened after its \$6 million renovation, the largest capital project in its history.

The stylish renovation included a new glassed-in theater lobby within the historic 1927 four-story beaux-arts building in downtown Hartford. The downstairs theater, which seats 188, was also reconfigured to be more spacious, adaptable, and up-to-date.

It was a major ta-daa for the little theater company that began in the mid-'80s playing small-cast shows wherever it could scrounge a stage. But from those early days to the present, it was always known for its resilience, imagination, and hustle.

Since the '90s when TheaterWorks

purchased the building — formerly owned by the Hartford Gas Co. — its inventive leadership, dedicated small staff, and loyal audiences had made it a major player among larger Connecticut's Tony Award-winning regional theaters, even having bragging rights with the largest subscription base and, in some years, top awards from the Connecticut Critics Circle, too.

Like many of the regional theaters in the state, TheaterWorks has also produced shows that have had future lives in New York and around the country, such as the musicals *Ella* and *Make Me a Song: The Music of William Finn*, and Valerie Harper in the play, *The Dragon and the Pearl*. *High*, starring Kathleen Turner, even made it to Broadway.

The theater, now in its 37th year, has also produced a wide range of acclaimed plays and musicals — including many recent works from

off-Broadway and Broadway — for local audiences. Recent productions include *American Son*, *The Lifespan of a Fact*, *A Doll's House, Part 2*, *Take Me Out*, *Hand to God*, and *The Wolves*. Its original holiday show — *Christmas on the Rocks* — has become a popular perennial for years and enters the 10th go-round this December.

Among its “brand,” beyond the quality of its productions, are its flexibility in its programming, its nimbleness in trying new things, and the attentiveness in its customer services.

Indeed, the personal touch between its staff and theatergoers may be its most cherished asset. Many like “audience boss” Josh Demers and director of marketing and communications Freddie McInerney have been there for much of the theater's checkered history. To get a sense of TheaterWorks' personal touch,



Rob Ruggiero, TheaterWorks Artistic Director, during the renovation.

just take a look at TheaterWorks's website (twhartford.org) and check out its staff page. It's not a cold categorizing of names but rather as an assemblage of real people in a playful photoshoot, giving a human face and sense of warmth to a typically dry listing of theater personnel.

Pandemic challenges

"We want to be Netflix, not Blockbusters," says Rob Ruggiero, who has been with the theater for 30 years, first as director, then associate artistic director, and for the past seven years as producing artistic director, succeeding its entrepreneurial founder Steve Campo.

It's a motto he frequently says as a way of explaining the theater's openness and to move forward with the times "in making theater in new and innovative ways."

But when the pandemic hit, closing theaters nationwide for months and creating an unstable operative landscape for more than two years, that philosophy was tested in profound ways.

Once again, TheaterWorks showed its indefatigable spirit.

"I feel like the ability to pivot and respond to the moment is something that has defined TheaterWorks over the decades — and continues to

define us with even more meaning in this moment," he says.

Many arts groups retreated or did modest engagement when faced with closures, but TheaterWorks rallied its troops and came up with an immediate plan of action to continue to connect with its followers — and perhaps even to reach out to new fans beyond its geographical limits.

"We knew we needed to respond to the moment," says Ruggiero. "We immediately made the decision to persist, and we also saw it as an opportunity to explore new ways of creating theater."

It brought in digital experts, invested in technology, and then offered a large menu of online offerings to keep audiences engaged and entertained. It ranged from concerts to readings to an at-home series, "Get Sauced With Rob," which featured Ruggiero preparing pasta sauce in his kitchen while informally chatting with theater pals.

It partnered with other theaters and presenting new on-line work





such as *Russian Troll Farm: A Workplace Comedy*, which was a “critic’s pick” of *The New York Times*. TheaterWorks also brought film and theater directors together to collaborate on such works as the play, *The Sound Inside*. And when it was safer to gather outdoors, it produced a site-specific theater piece with the premiere of *Walden* in the woods and meadows along the Connecticut River, in a partnership with Hartford’s Riverfront Recapture. The theater also presented online a production it had previously filmed when it was on its stage, its hit musical, “*Next To Normal*” (along with a conversation with its Tony Award-winning composer Tom Kitt).

As its programming changed, so did its business model, going from a subscription-based plan to one that was membership-based before changing to an eventual hybrid.

Looking Forward

“We’re not just sitting here thinking we’re just getting through this and then it’s back to business as usual,” says Ruggiero. “The economy is going to be struggling and that landscape will be very vulnerable. We might have to take a few steps back but there are ways to go forward in that journey as well.”

One of those “steps back” during the pandemic was the furloughing a portion of its staff of around 20. For those who remained as the pandemic dragged on, the producing burden eventually took its toll.

Ruggiero says it had to reassess how much the theater could realistically do as the pandemic landscape changed from month to month.



The TheaterWorks' flamboyant and outrageous, April performances of *Elton Undressed*, were a musical success.

"What we learned last year is that we bit off more than we could chew and that was hard," he says. "We've always run with a lean, dedicated staff, and what we learned was we have to take care of them, too."

This year, there is a commitment for a better work-life balance for the staff, he says.

Beyond TheaterWorks, Ruggiero has also directed at regional theaters across the country and has staged some of Goodspeed Musicals' most acclaimed shows for more than a decade. He also has directed *High* with Kathleen Turner and *Looped* with Valerie Harper on Broadway, who received a Tony Award nomination for her performance. Both plays were written by Connecticut native Matthew Lombardo.

It's a career that the Massachusetts native couldn't imagine in 2007 when a cancerous tumor was discovered wrapped around his spinal column. Operations and aggressive chemotherapy saved his life, he says, and he is now cancer free.

At age 60, Ruggiero says he has no plans to leave TheaterWorks any time soon, but he and the board have begun to think about what a transition would look like. Aware of the need for greater diversity, he anticipates that a woman and/or a BiPOC person will be heading the theater.

Upcoming at the theater is *Zoey's Perfect Wedding* by Matthew Lopez (who wrote TW's *The Legend of Georgia McBride* and Broadway's Tony Award-winning *The Inheritance*). It will run from April 30 to June 5. The 2022-'23 season will be announced soon.

But TheaterWorks is already looking beyond the next season. *Hurricane Diane* was postponed from a slot this summer and will now open in September 2023 and begin the 2023-'24 season. 📺





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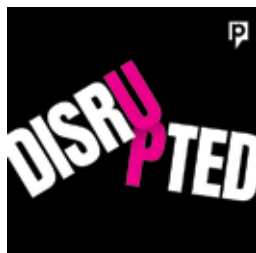
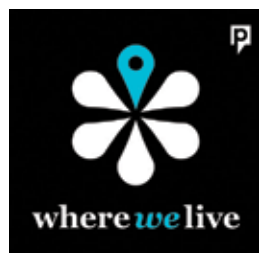
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Spring Home Landscaping

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."



UConn SOIL TESTING SERVICE:

Soil Testing Lab (uconn.edu)

GARDEN CLUB TOURS:

Federated Garden Clubs of CT
(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.com)

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

Weddings 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

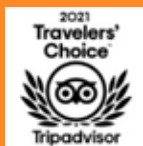


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parties wear: tuxes have been replaced by suits, ranging from blue to pink, and not necessarily matching.

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.

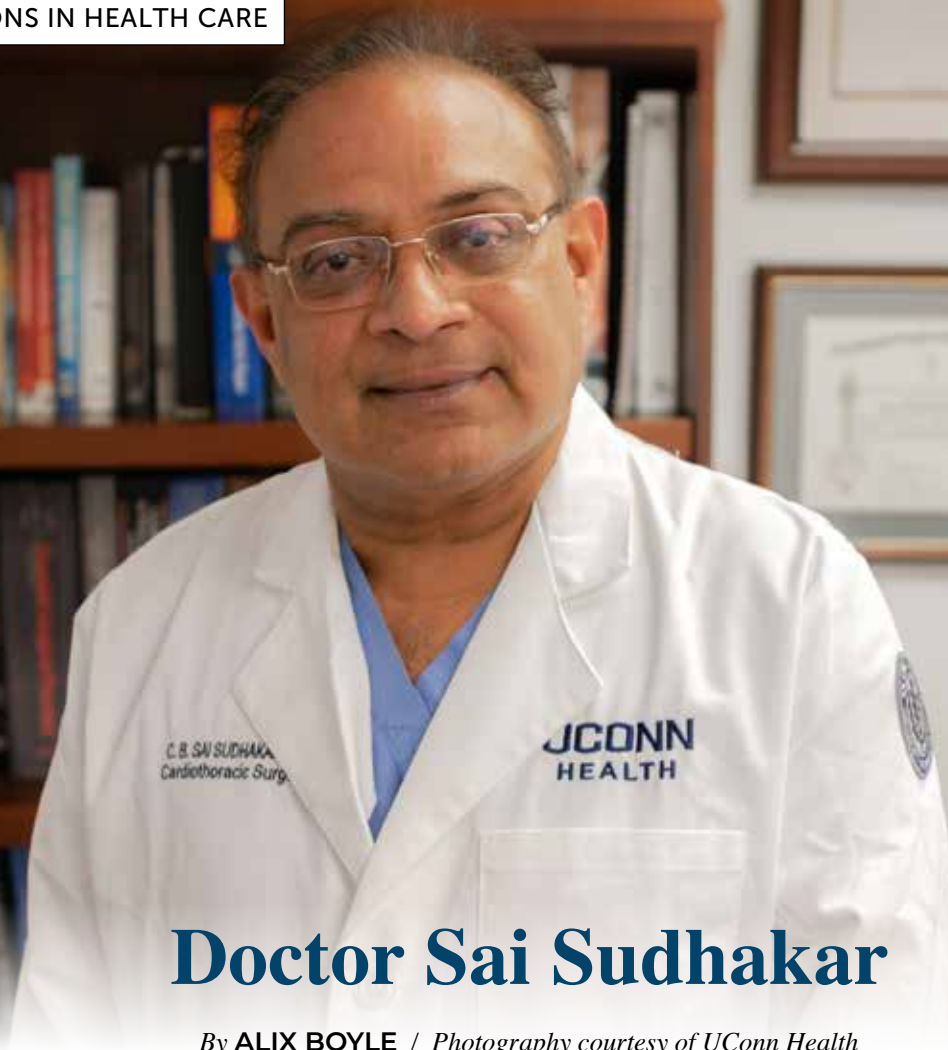
There are two schools of thought on the sparkler farewell. One venue owner says he’s thrilled they’re passé; another loves them and still sees them all the time.

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

Growing 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. ■

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Lacrosse Throughout the Decades

From Native American Beginnings to Adult Leagues

By ANDREW KELSEY

Beginning 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.”

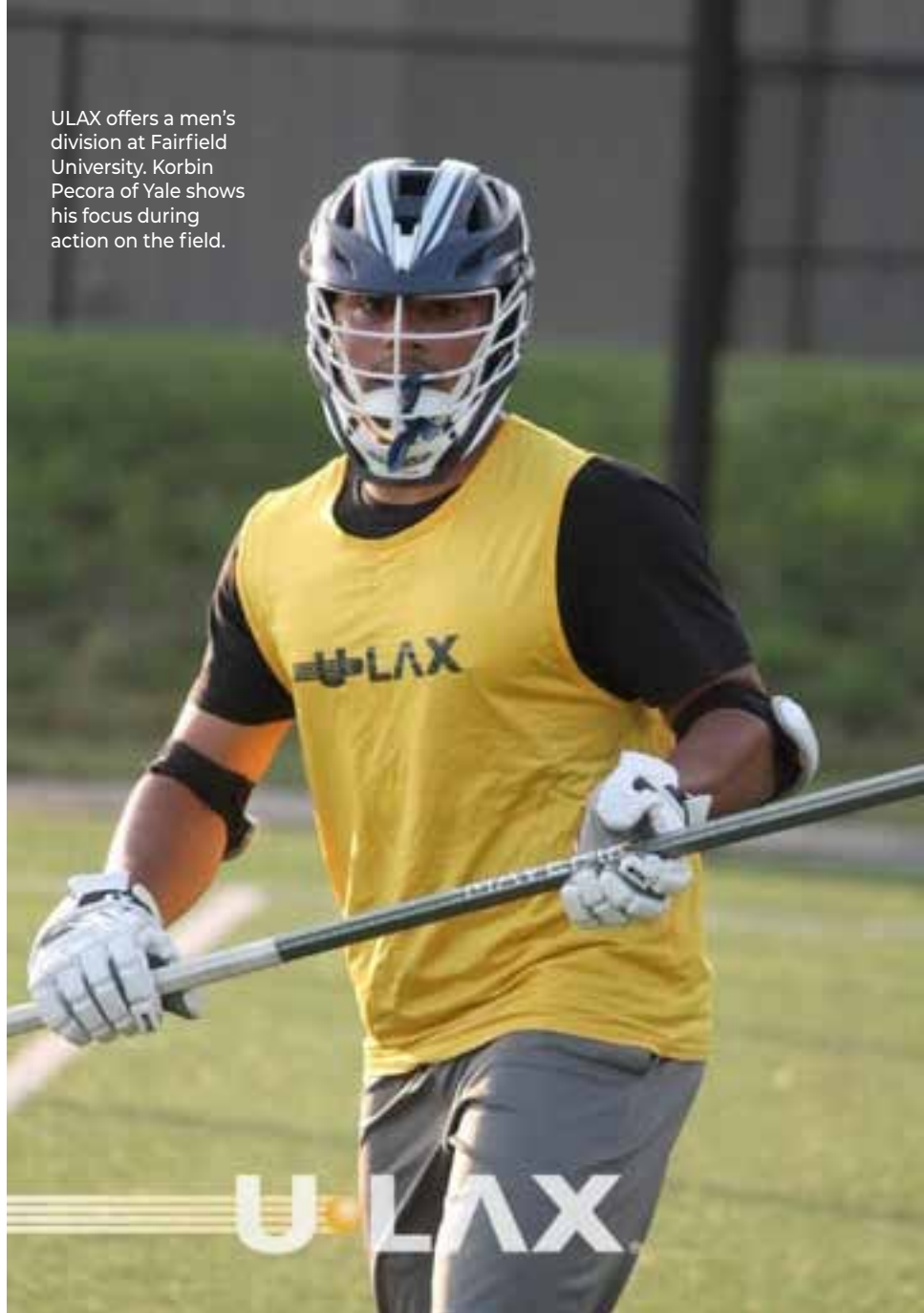
Nell has prior ties to Connecticut lacrosse; she was the head girls’ team coach at New Fairfield High School for seven seasons. Nell’s New Fairfield teams won three straight Class S State Championships from 2017-2019, and back-to-back South-West Conference Championships in 2018 and 2019. In seven seasons, 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.

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.

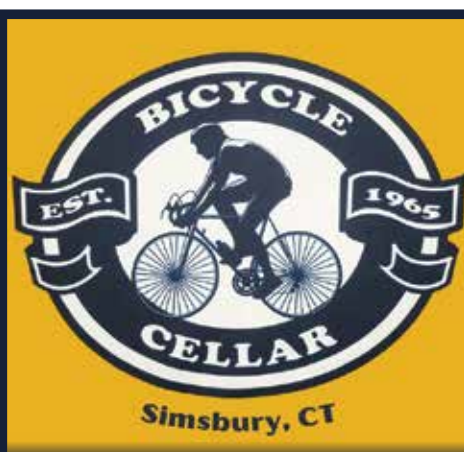
"Under the guidance of the CIAC Girls and Boys Sports Committees and the hard work of the dedicated coaches, athletic directors, school administrators,

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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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.

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.

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.

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).

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.



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, Meridan 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.

Take a Hike! 📷

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Take Your Child to Work Day Is a Total Farce

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

It'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.

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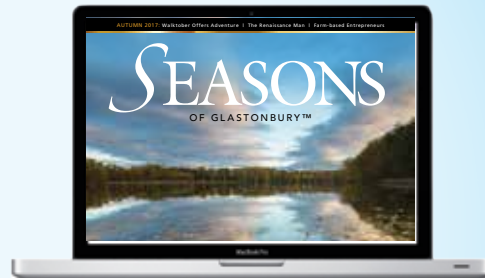
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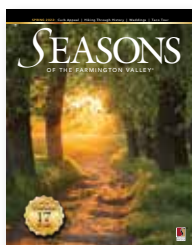
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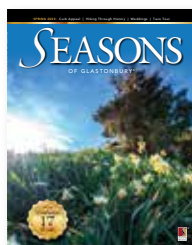


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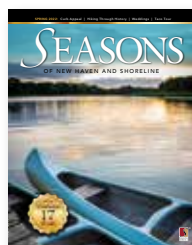
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