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Information sessions

Seasons' Greetings



Mary Hawkins

Welcome to the summer issue of *Seasons Magazines!*

In this issue, we're inspired by a slower pace of life, enjoying much-needed quality time with family and friends, and, of course, getting outdoors to enjoy the warm weather and sunshine.

For those of you who love adventure, we take you on a journey into the history of amusement parks in

Connecticut while highlighting why they're still so popular to this day. We're also giving you a seafood tour of the state, showcasing all of the best places to have lobster rolls and more this summer and for the rest of 2022.

Now is the perfect time to venture outside and appreciate all of our state's gorgeous flowers in bloom, so we're sharing some wonderful places to pick-your-own bouquets. We're also highlighting a special Connecticut family who is giving back to their community and beyond by providing special glasses to childhood eye cancer survivors.

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

Happy reading, and Happy Summer!

Mary

Mary Hawkins
Editor
Seasons Magazines



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We want to tell our readers stories about the interesting people and places in our beautiful state. It's that simple. – JIM TULLY



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2022

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“CAUSE A LITTLE BIT OF
SUMMER IS WHAT THE
WHOLE YEAR IS
ALL ABOUT.”

-John Mayer





Elie Sader, M.D.

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

Elie Sader, M.D., a pain neurologist, began serving patients at Saint Francis Hospital in July 2021 after completing his fellowship in Interventional Pain Management at New York University. He is board-certified in both Neurology and Pain Management. Since starting at Saint Francis, Dr. Sader has implemented a Pain Neurology Clinic. The clinic is a subdivision of the neurology department. This is a fairly unique model for a pain management service. Dr. Sader explains that the majority of pain management services are run by anesthesiologists or, less frequently, by physiatrists (Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation). This Pain Neurology Clinic is a first for Saint Francis and for Connecticut. Until now, the closest neurology-driven pain services available were in Boston or New York City.

The Pain Neurology Clinic is multidisciplinary. Dr. Sader works with a registered nurse, physician assistants (PAs), advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), nurse practitioners, medical assistants, and a surgical scheduler. He explains that about half of the patients he sees in the clinic come to him for control of headaches, and the other half come for pain management “of everything else – neck pain, back pain, sciatica, and various types of joint pain.”

Dr. Sader believes in an integrated approach to treating pain. “It is really uncommon to have a patient who has only one pain generator in their body,” he says. A patient may initially come in for treatment of one type of pain, but they are happy to discover that he can treat their other sources of pain, too. Dr. Sader explains that after obtaining a complete history and physical, and performing diagnostic tests such as imaging studies (MRI, X-ray), or nerve conduction studies, he will have a discussion with the patient about treatment options and realistic expectations for pain control. Together, he and the patient prioritize which pain problem to tackle first, and which approach (medication, procedure, conservative) best aligns with the patient’s wishes.

Dr. Sader feels this integrated model makes more sense than a person seeing different doctors for pain in different parts of their body. He also thinks this model increases safety for the patient. Whenever a patient is seeing multiple providers for the same problem, there is a risk of miscommunication between providers, and there can be differences in how each provider approaches pain management, which could conflict, and overlapping prescriptions for medications in the same class can create problems for the patient that no single provider takes ownership over.

Patients, of course, see other specialists to manage their disease(s), but through the Saint Francis Pain Neurology Clinic,

Dr. Sader is the point person for the pain management piece of the disease. He gives the example of a patient with arthritis pain. The patient sees a rheumatologist who manages medications to control the progression of arthritis, and perhaps an orthopedic doctor who may have offered the option of a joint replacement down the line. However, the arthritis has already caused joint damage and pain. Dr. Sader sees the patient specifically to address the joint pain and any other type of pain the patient might have.

Dr. Sader’s approach to pain management is multi-faceted. He uses three main modalities, often in combination “because doing just one of these is not enough, and they tend to have a synergistic effect.” They are:

Medications: There are many options depending on the type of pain. Some patients want to avoid or minimize medication use out of concern for drug side effects, or simply due to the inconvenience of having to take pain medications daily.

Interventional procedures: There are various types of pain-relieving procedures including nerve blocks, trigger point injections in muscles, joint injections with a combination of corticosteroids to reduce inflammation and a local anesthetic to reduce pain, neurotomy procedures to “burn” specific nerves that cause pain, spinal injections/epidurals to reduce inflammation around a herniated disc, and botulinum toxin injections.

Conservative approaches: Physical Therapy, massage, acupuncture.

He explains that while the interventional procedures reduce pain, the effects don’t last forever. However, the period of improved pain control allows patients to participate in physical therapy or other conservative approaches providing a more sustained benefit. For example, a herniated disc causing nerve root compression and sciatic pain will typically respond well to an epidural steroid injection (which is a type of spinal injection). However, the epidural itself is not curing the disease. It is lessening the pain (tremendously in most cases) for several months up to a year, during which time the patient will be able to better participate in physical therapy, which will lead to less compression of the affected nerve root with time. Patients are sometimes unable to participate in PT due to the extent of pain they already have (which is only worsened by PT at times), and the spinal injection alone is not sufficient to lead to permanent relief, however, the combination of the two leads to the best model to proper healing.

THE ROAD TO HARTFORD

Dr. Sader majored in neuroscience for his undergraduate studies at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. There, his focus



ELIE SADER, MD
Pain Neurology
Chronic Pain



Elie Sader, M.D., Pain Neurologist,
Saint Francis Hospital

was mainly on research examining at the molecular level how different medicines worked and how the circuitry in the brain conveys emotions and mental states. He went on to complete graduate studies in neuroscience at the University of Oxford in England. It was there that he developed his interest in clinical neuroscience and the desire to pursue medicine. He completed medical school at The University of Toronto.

This was followed by a 4-year neurology residency at Boston University Medical Center. “Here,” he says, “I was lucky enough to have my first exposure to pain management.” He says he gravitated toward this specialty “because you are able to help a patient on the spot as opposed to just diagnosing their disease and referring them to another provider without having any ability to change the disease course.”

Because of his passion for pain management, Dr. Sader pursued the fellowship in Interventional Pain Management at New York University. He explains that the majority of physicians accepted into the program are anesthesiologists with only a few spots available for other subspecialties such as neurology.

Dr. Sader was thrilled to now be calling the greater Hartford area home, where he is able to treat patients in an underserved region. He enjoys the area very much and likes being close to his friends in Boston and New York.

Dr. Sader’s dual training in neurology and pain management has proven to be a great benefit to his patients. While traditionally Neurologists diagnosis patients and are excellent at finding the “lesion” or culprit for a given symptom or pain disorder, it’s less common for a Neurologist to have also undergone procedural training in residency. In contrast, most physicians who specialize in pain management begin seeing patients once they are diagnosed and referred from another physician and they are ready for treatment. Dr. Sader’s specialized dual training allows him to serve the patient in a multifaceted way. Having gained both the neurology detective skills and the anesthesiology procedural toolkit, he is able to integrate both diagnosis and treatment, which directly feed into each other, so that if one treatment doesn’t work, he is able to use that feedback directly to guide his diagnosis and subsequent treatments, ultimately providing a significantly more efficient and satisfying patient experience.

ADVANCES AND CHALLENGES IN PAIN MEDICINE

There have been several advances made in the area of pain management over the last few years. One of the biggest is the availability of a new class of medications to treat migraine headaches. They are called CGRP inhibitors. CGRP stands for calcitonin gene-related peptide, which is a protein in the brain involved in transmitting pain sensations. Dr. Sader explains that these medications work well, have fewer side effects than the classic migraine medications, and are available to be taken by mouth, so they are convenient, too.

There are also advances in interventional procedures, but they are still in the experimental stages, so they are not yet available through the Pain Neurology Clinic. These include “regenerative therapies,” where rather than injecting a joint with a combination of steroid and local anesthetic, components such as stem cells are injected into the joint instead to repair the damage, however further studies are needed to prove their efficacy and cost-effectiveness.

The opioid epidemic has continued to provide challenges as

well as opportunities in pain management. Dr. Sader explains that opioids are often not the best option for treating chronic pain conditions, but in the past, patients may have been prescribed them because interventional modalities were not offered. “Many patients don’t realize there are other options available to them,” Dr. Sader says. He proudly reports that he has had success transitioning several patients away from opioid pain medications. And as individuals seek alternatives to opioids, his practice is growing.

FUTURE PLANS

Dr. Sader envisions a new model for providing pain management where acute pain and chronic pain are treated simultaneously. Dr. Sader explains that presently, individuals with chronic pain disorders such as chronic back pain or migraine headaches are typically followed in a pain clinic. However, once that patient inevitably has a flare of their disorder (for example, precipitated by a change in barometric pressure, or lifting a heavy object), they are unlikely to be able to be seen by the chronic pain clinic in a timely fashion, and often have to seek treatment at an emergency room, where they may end up waiting for treatment.

Dr. Sader is currently developing a practice model for the Pain Neurology Clinic where those acute pain episodes, which are simply bound to happen with any chronic pain disorder, can also be treated in the clinic. It would be much better for the patient to be seen by someone who already knows them and the history of their pain and treatments. “This is where the field should go,” he says. For example, a migraineur who is well controlled on prophylactic medications, may still have an acute migraine attack once every few months. Instead of going to the ED, they would now have the option of calling the clinic and dropping in as an add on where they can be evaluated by Dr. Sader and his team, to determine whether intravenous migraine medications, occipital nerve block, or sphenopalatine ganglion block, may help their headache so they can return to work within the hour. The same applies to muscular and joint pains, where trigger point injections and local anesthetic injections often relieve the pain on the spot. In that sense, Dr. Sader is aiming to create a pain, urgent care-style clinic geared toward helping patients with chronic and acute pain using established safe, non-opioid medications and procedural interventions. “We have had tremendous success with many patients who have benefited from this model thus far,” explained Dr. Sader. “This is only going to increase in the months to come, as we have now expanded our group and moved to our own Pain Neurology suite at Saint Francis to better accommodate our pain patients and alleviate their unnecessary suffering.” He is planning to also integrate other services into the clinic in the next six months, such as a physical therapist and acupuncturist on site, in order to provide even more comprehensive care for 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.



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High School Mascots:

A Long-Standing Tradition in a New Era of Controversy

By DENNIS HOUSE

If you haven't heard yet, we're in the middle of a major mascot overhaul in Connecticut, with plenty of high schools in the process of making a change. I thought I'd start here by suggesting a few new monikers for local teams. What about the Pomperaug Porcupines? Or how about the Conard Copperheads, or the West Haven Whales?

All over Connecticut, some cities and towns have been grappling with how to replace school mascots that are insensitive to Native Americans. Not too long ago, several schools in the state called themselves the Indians and now have renamed their mascots. On the national level we've seen this, too. The Cleveland Indians are now the Cleveland Guardians, and the Washington Redskins are now the Commanders.

In the town of West Hartford, there was tremendous debate over the retiring of the mascots of its two public high schools: the Hall Warriors and the Conard Chieftains. The names were deemed insensitive and offensive to some, and in June, the board of education unveiled their new brand names and logos. They're now called the Conard Red Wolves and the Hall Titans.

A half hour away from West Hartford, however, the town of Watertown is embracing its new mascot, the Warriors, which was chosen to replace a racially insensitive mascot, the Indians. Wilton and Canton also kept Warriors but erased anything questionable from the logos. This has some people asking the question, "How can a mascot be insensitive in one town and not the other?"

The issue of retiring Warriors and Chieftains was such a controversial issue in West Hartford that a petition was started. I spoke to several who signed it, and they told me the townspeople should have decided, not the board of education. West Hartford rightly eliminated all Native American imagery

from both mascots years ago, and proponents of a change argue that Warriors and Chieftains do not actually refer to Native Americans. They referred me to a book written by a guy from West Hartford, Noah Webster.

WHAT DOES WEBSTER'S DICTIONARY SAY?

Definition of *warrior*: a person engaged or experienced in warfare

broadly: a person engaged in some struggle or conflict

Definition of *chieftain*: 1. A captain, leader, or commander; a chief; the head of a troop, army, or clan.

Despite what Webster's dictionary states, the move to replace Native American mascots began more than a decade ago and has picked up steam in the past year. Last year, a state law was passed, which says public schools which use Native American names or images for mascots, nicknames, logos, or team names could lose state funding in 2023. The funding comes from slot revenues from the Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan Tribes.

Montville recently dumped its Indians name when the specter of losing \$1.4 million in state funding from the state loomed over the town. Killingly, which changed its Redmen nickname to Red Hawks then reversed the decision. It could lose big bucks in 2023, the date lawmakers gave towns to rid themselves of offensive nicknames.

MASCOTS WERE A DIFFERENT STORY BACK IN THE DAY

At the turn of the century, there were no fewer than eight schools that called themselves the Indians, and some towns were actually right next to each other. Farmington and Newington share a border and had identical nicknames, and right next door in West Hartford, Northwest Catholic was also

the Indians. A few miles away, there were the Manchester Indians, and Indians also played in North Haven, Guilford, Montville, and Watertown.

Other Native Americans nicknames were RHAM (Hebron) Sachems, the Coventry Chieftains, and Rocky Hill were Chieftains, too. There were also the Wilton Warriors and the Glastonbury Tomahawks.

Connecticut has some great original and unique mascots. Among my favorites are the Wreckers of Staples High in Westport, and the Whippets of Windham. I'm also a fan of the New London Whalers — appropriate for the Whaling City — and the Wilbur Cross (New Haven) Governors.

Wilbur Cross was governor of Connecticut from 1931 to 1939. And another one of the best is The Danbury Mad Hatters, a perfect choice for the Hat City. Another great name is the East Hampton Bellringers, although they do not have a football team. Bells were made there for years.

Then there are two team names that represent geography. The New Milford Green Wave is an homage to the Litchfield Hills surrounding this bucolic town. Ditto for Darien: The Blue Wave is a salute to Long Island Sound, where this town sits.

Some schools have nicknames that you won't hear anywhere else in our state, including among others:

- The Bloomfield Warhawks
- Fairfield Prep Jesuits
- Hartford Public Owls
- Hyde-New Haven Howling Wolves
- New Britain Golden Hurricanes
- Shelton Gaels

There is also a flock of football Falcons, including:

- Avon
- Fitch of Groton
- Ludlowe of Fairfield
- Barlow of Redding
- St. Paul of Bristol
- Xavier of Middletown

There was some disappointment in Enfield when Enfield High and Fermi High merged and chose a nickname. They went with Eagles, which is already used in Wethersfield and nine other schools in Connecticut. The two towns play each other, so what do the cheerleaders say? "Go Eagles, beat the Eagles?"

Masuk of Monroe and Wilby of Waterbury share the same logo with different colors, but different names. They are the Masuk Panthers and the Wilby Wildcats. But want to know what my all-time favorites are? The Kingswood Oxford Wyverns and the Avon Old Farms Winged Beavers.

WHAT MIGHT'VE BEEN AND WHAT COULD BE

Back to Copperheads and Porcupines. These are animals that exist in Connecticut but are not honored in mascotland. My friend, Ronni Newton, the founder and publisher of we-ha.com, suggested some great marketing ideas if Conard chose Copperheads. By the way, these snakes are indigenous to the Conard district.

Ronni said the student section could be the Viper Den. Ronni also reported on a suggestion for Hall High to go with —

the Monitors. Get it, the Hall Monitors? A monitor lizard could be the mascot.

Bears are ubiquitous in Connecticut, yet I could only find one town that uses Bears. There are some very cool unique mascots you'll find nowhere else, like the Marvelwood Pterodactyls, the Moodus Noises, and the Terryville Kangaroos. And on the collegiate level, how do you not like Connecticut College Camels?

MASCOTS ARE A TRADITION

So, why are mascots such a big deal? It's really quite simple. They're rooted in tradition. They bring a town or school an identity, and often, school colors become the town's colors. Mascots can also be entertaining and raise school and town spirit long after the games and seasons are over. If the mascot is unique, it can really make you stand out.

For the record, my high school was the Xaverian Brothers Hawks, and my college, the Assumption Greyhounds, was offensive to no one I believe.

Though I have to say, I'm partial to my dad's alma mater, The Haverhill (MA) Hillies, though the brown and yellow colors could stand a makeover.

But no matter what a team is called, the whole concept of being part of a team is for students to come together to work toward a common goal, and to cheer each other on in the process. For that reason, it makes perfect sense for the name to be something inclusive that can be celebrated by everyone for years to come. ■



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Dishing about the Current and Future State of Home Buying and Home Selling

By TERESA M. PELHAM

Dawn Gagliardi, a licensed Realtor with the Corrado Group in South Windsor and West Hartford, has seen it all in terms of real estate in the past year or two: Dozens of offers made on a house in a single day, and offers \$100K over asking price. But she assures us that things will eventually level out, the market will correct itself, and one day, it will be a buyer's market.

Q: Have you seen an influx of people wanting to get into the real estate business because houses are selling so easily? What advice would you give to someone considering a career as a Realtor?

A: The past couple of years have made it seem really easy, and that you're going to have hundreds of sales in the first year. But once things balance out, agents are going to need a skill set. They're going to have to know how to negotiate, and they're going to have to know how to build and maintain relationships. In this market, we've had so many buyers, but the market won't be like this forever, and soon, it's going to be more balanced. Agents will have to be able to build and maintain relationships with other Realtors, and will have to sharpen their negotiating skills to get to the closing table for their clients. It will take a lot more skill! There will absolutely be a shift in the market - it has to correct itself. I don't think there will be a crash or any depreciation, but a correction is necessary to avoid a crash. We do expect things to even out, but it's nothing to be scared of. This kind of market just isn't sustainable. I think the correction will benefit everyone in the long run.

Q: Have you watched Selling Sunset? How does a show like that affect the way people see the real estate business?

A: I've seen *Million Dollar Listing* and a lot of the HGTV shows. They definitely take some creative liberties and focus on the drama to make it more interesting. I was going to be on one of those shows and spoke at length with the casting director, and they're definitely focused on making it as interesting as possible. The process in some of those shows is realistic, but many times if buyers are shown three houses to buy, they've actually already bought one of them. It's not reality, but it certainly is fun to watch!

Q: How important is it to make sure your buyers have pre-approval letters (as opposed to pre-qualification letters) from a lender?

A: It's extremely important! In fact, some of my preferred local lenders are actually giving buyers not just pre-approval letters



Dawn Gagliardi

but pre-commitment letters, essentially running buyers through underwriting and eliminating the need for a mortgage contingency in the contract to make sure they have the most attractive offer. The best thing to do is talk to a good local lender far in advance of even needing a mortgage. They can tell you how to best prepare by paying certain things off or looking at what other things they can do to improve their credit and qualify for even more.

Q: Now that "love letters" from buyers to sellers are frowned upon, what are buyers doing to stand out among multiple offers?

A: There are still many things that buyers can do to stand out. Being able to cover an appraisal gap if the house doesn't appraise high enough. Not doing inspections, or if you are doing an inspection waiving the contingencies. The fewer contingencies you have, the better you're going to look on paper. Being flexible with closing dates. Here's something buyers are doing now: They'll close in a month but lease to the seller for two months, so the seller has time to find their next home. In today's market, many times people can easily sell their house, but then it takes a while to find another home, so flexibility with that can be very attractive to sellers.

Q: Are you seeing buyers deciding to build or renovate because they are unable to get an offer accepted?

A: Yes, many people have outgrown their current homes, and if they can't find a new home to purchase they are deciding to add on to their existing homes. This isn't always easy though because material costs are still high, labor is hard to come by, and going through a town to get inspections and approvals takes a long time and can be really challenging. This is because there aren't as many people working for the towns, and it's hard to get on their schedule. Plus, it's difficult to find a contractor to build or renovate a house. Something interesting that's happening is people will buy an old house in need of repair and have a builder demolish it but leave the foundation intact and build on top of that. Finding plots of land in Connecticut is really difficult.

Q: What's the average number of offers buyers are making today versus five years ago?

A: It was a buyer's market five years ago, and buyers were able to start low and negotiate since there typically weren't multiple offer scenarios. Now, I've had buyers make five or ten offers before getting one accepted. But the market is definitely slowing down. It's not as insane as it's been recently, which is really good for buyers.

Teresa M. Pelham is a Farmington-based writer. She regularly visits schools to spread awareness about animal rescue. To learn more about her three children's books or to schedule an author visit at your child's school, please visit www.roxysforeverhome.com



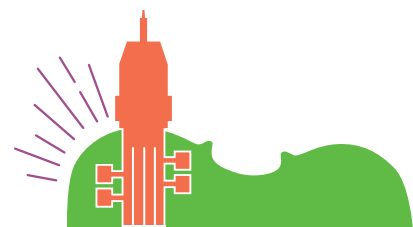
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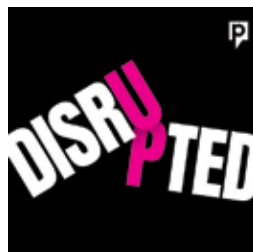
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Wicked Tulips, Preston, CT. Photo by Jeroen Koeman

CT's Pick-Your-Own

By TOVAH MARTIN

Admit it: Ever since the weather started warming up, you've been lusting for a big bouquet of fresh flowers. You can think of a dozen different places where that bouquet would be primo, starting with your kitchen table and moving into your bedroom nightstand and bathroom sink. But come to think of it, you've also been yearning to get outside into the fresh air for a family outing. Well, here's an idea: How about combining those two strong impulses for a Pick-Your-Own (PYO) flower event?

Imagine a beautiful day with the birdies singing and the pollinators

fluttering while you are in your shirtsleeves lapping up the opportunity to soak in some sunbeams. Stretched in front of you are beds of beautiful flowers just begging to be cut, whisked home, and arranged into vases to furnish days—maybe even weeks—of enjoyment. You could make it into a family affair. You might bring your mom, kids, cousins, best friends, and your favorite pair of pruning shears. You can do it in a flash or spend time savoring the scene. And you can snag flowers in exactly the color combo that your creative juices crave.

Have a wedding coming up? Or do you just want to do something nice for your church group? Maybe you need

to give someone a surprise smile or a little boost to elevate their flagging spirits. PYO flowers are capable of performing all those feats and more. Often, your clutch of flowers will cost a fraction of a similar purchase from a florist. Plus, you get boasting rights—You are the creative genius behind your arrangement.

Fortunately, Connecticut offers several opportunities for PYO with cut flower fields scattered throughout the state. Some open early in the season. Others kick in during July onward when cut flowers are going strong. Check out our overview of options right here. Get ready, get set, start picking!

WICKED TULIPS PRESTON, CT

If many thousands of tulips sparkling in the sun say spring to you, Wicked Tulips has a treat. The result of a eureka moment that struck Jeroen and Keriann Koeman. When they had leftover tulips, they resourcefully planted their excess and then invited the public to come pick flowers in the spring. At the time, they were based in Virginia, but in 2015, they found land in Rhode Island and began Wicked Tulips—opening their tulip field to PYO crowds every spring. Their idea was so wildly successful that Wicked Tulips expanded to five acres in Preston, CT where they planted 550,000 tulips for the 2022 season just begging to be plucked in an ultra-scenic bucolic rural farm field.

Because Mother Nature has a mind of her own, they can't predict the exact opening date, but you should start looking for online tickets at their website (that's www.wickedtulips.com) in late April or early May. "We want the fields to look absolutely gorgeous when you come," explains Leah Hill, "so we wait for 30% of the tulips to be open." From the starting date, PYO usually continues for about 2 weeks—focusing on a timeframe when all the flowers are picture perfect. They also stagger entry times to make



Picking is so much fun to do with the kids.



The beauty of flowers is in the simplicity.

your experience sublime.

Not only does Wicked Tulips endeavor to make a memorable PYO experience, they also offer the full gamut of tulips. We're talking 70 different varieties in the full spectrum of tulip hues. Being in the bulb business, Jeroen plants tulips of every shape and frill, including traditional, peony-like doubles, lily-petaled tulips, fringed tulips, parrot tulips, and more. Adults are charged \$20.00 for entry with a ticket that allows plucking of 10 tulips to take home. Additional tulips can be purchased for \$1.00 a stem. Children 5-17 are charged \$5.00 for entry, and for little kids 5 and under, no ticket is needed. No pets are allowed other than valid service animals. And for your picking convenience, buckets are furnished, or you can bring your own. Get ready to savor a memorable experience tiptoeing through the tulips...with souvenirs to bring home.



Scotts Farm by Winter Caplanson

ANDERSON ACRES FARM, 1 ANDERSON ACRES RD, KENT, CT

Although Anderson Acres in Kent is not a PYO venue, this productive flower farm comes close with a 4-week subscription for a spring bouquet picked up at their barn on Thursday afternoons starting in May from their two acres planted solidly to flowers. They run the gamut from tulips to ranunculus, and it doesn't end there. For the rest of the growing

season, you can buy their voluptuous arrangements spilling with dahlias and a broad spectrum of other fabulous flowers grown at the farm sold either in bunches or arrangements available as single purchases or by subscription. Go to www.andersonacresfarm.com for details. And there's more...starting in May, Anderson Acres sets up a flower bar with tiers of buckets overflowing with cut flowers at the Kent Flower Market in front of the RT Facts Design and Antiques shop in the middle of town. The Flower Market usually

convenes every 2nd Saturday morning during the growing season, but there are exceptions, so go to Kent Flower Market on Facebook for dates and times.

PETERSEN'S FLOWER FARM, 125 BURGESS ROAD, SOUTH WINDSOR, CT

This 15-acre venue provides the full spectrum farming experience including a corn path and pumpkins. In 2003, they hatched the eureka concept of planting rows of cut flowers. "It started as a silly little idea to just try flowers, but it's grown," says Susan Petersen. Petersen's Flower Farm now grows 4 acres of PYO cut flowers, available from the weekend after July 4th onward. Planted in May, they strive to give visitors the full breadth of options. For folks who don't want to wade too deeply into the field, they scatter a smorgasbord throughout so you can create a bouquet without wandering far. The diversity is jaw-dropping – including gomphrena, snapdragons, love-lies-bleeding, and other amaranths, cosmos, ammi, ageratum, dusty miller, celosia, etc. In other words, you could go to this



The Dahlia Daughters



SCOTTS' FARM AND GREENHOUSES, 81 PLAINS RD, ESSEX, CT

From mid to late July onward, the one-acre field beside the greenhouses at Scotts' Farm is buzzing with brides selecting their own flowers, florists stocking up on fresh cuts, restaurateurs gathering the goodies to create their own tabletop bouquets, and folks like you and I blissfully enjoying the bounty. Coming from a family with five generations of farming in their heritage, the Scotts open their farm stand early in spring, selling bedding plants, perennials, and patio pots started in the greenhouses. Simultaneously, behind the scenes, they are busy plowing the cut flower field. Although they can never predict exactly when it will be ready for picking, they suggest you keep an eye on their website, www.scottsfarms.com, and Facebook page. Or, if you happen to be cruising by, look for fellow cut flower enthusiasts filling their buckets—the field is clearly visible from the road.

With 80 varieties of flowers including colorful rudbeckias, marigolds, gomphrena, celosias, sunflowers, amaranths, etc, the scene is so ultra-colorful, you can't help but rubberneck when driving by. Ask Jane Scott-Lavezzoli to name her favorite bouquet *prima donnas*, and

Brown's Harvest.

field and create a full, totally alluring floral creation complete with all the fixings in any color of the spectrum. And the selection will send you into orbit—Petersen's Flower Farm plants 2,500 seeds of zinnias, for example. Plus, they put in 4,000 sunflowers – of all types.

Not only is the cutting experience totally mind-boggling, but the day will be memorable. "People come and hang out," says Susan, "it's like a little piece of nature." Envision a field bouncing with birds and buzzing with pollinators and you've touched on the ambiance. At their farm stand, Petersen's has cutters and buckets for your convenience. Cut flowers are sold for \$8.00 a pound, no matter what you gather.



Buttonwood



Brown's Harvest.

she won't miss a beat before declaring zinnias (7 rows!) and dahlias as personal favorites—a preference that is clearly evident in the field. When picking commences for the season, the public is invited to partake any time that the farm stand is open. You are encouraged to bring your own buckets—water is available at the farm stand for hydrating your stems, and the blossoms are sold by weight--\$9.95 per lb. Picking continues until frost. Last year, the field was still pumping out flowers in November, much to everyone's delight.

THE DAHLIA DAUGHTERS

If you ever found yourself tooling around Cornwall, CT in late summer, you surely slammed on the brakes as you whizzed by Something to Crow About—Amanda Chase's legendary, very prominent, and much-publicized dahlia field. She was the dahlia supplier to the stars—furnishing estates, florists, and brides with blossoms like you wouldn't believe. “Mom had 2,500 dahlias,” recalls her daughter, Allison Chase.

Tragically, we lost Amanda a few years ago. But her daughters, Allison and Stephanie Chase, are determined to keep the legacy alive. For two years, they've been selling PYO dahlias by appointment from their roadside raised beds in Sharon. With 16 raised beds (and adding more each season), they're working toward their mom's numbers. “We have 700 dahlias total now,” beams Allison, “plus we planted 200 zinnias for filler last year, and we're planning to add red hibiscus and coleus as well for this coming season.” Plus, the dahlia initiative is now based on the Sharon family farm where their mother first

began gardening.

The Chases can't predict exactly when PYO will commence this year—in 2020 they had blossoms for Father's Day weekend. But in 2021, the dahlias held off until the 3rd week in July. Check out their website at www.thedahliadaughters.com for updates. When it does happen, PYO is by appointment only and subject to availability—local restaurants are clued in, and demand sometimes overwhelms the crop. But these dahlias keep pumping out their phenomenal flowers until frost, so get in line and PYO dahlias will probably be in your future. Big, voluptuous, and heart-racingly outrageous, these dahlias are sold by the stem.

BROWN'S HARVEST, 1911 POQUONOCK AVE, WINDSOR, CT

Proof again that farming is something that you can't get out of your blood, Kathi Martin is the fifth generation to dig in at Brown's Harvest. This year will be the farm's 44th season of PYO strawberries and pumpkins. Five years ago, they added a PYO Sunflower Fest kicking off with a two-day event in 2018. It was such a happy moment that they now plant acres of sunflowers. There's a field for picking and a field to photograph your happy campers finding the sunflowers of their dreams. And the event is now spread over two weekends in August with vendors and food trucks as part of the festivities. Plus, painting and flower craft events are scheduled during the week in between.

To make sure that everyone has a spacious experience, timed tickets for entering the field and picking sunflowers, zinnias, and cosmos are

sold online, go to www.browns harvest.com for more information. Plus, there's a flower-planted labyrinth to walk for meditation. “August is flower focus month,” says Kathi. “It's really an experience,” she beams, “and it brings such joy to people.”

BUTTONWOOD FARM & ICE CREAM, 471 SHETUCKET TPKE, GRISWOLD, CT

Although Duane Button is not the type to boast, he admits that they grow “quite a few sunflowers” at Buttonwood Farm in Griswold. To be specific, they plant 14-15 acres of sunflowers. Some fields are meant solely for admiring during their Sunflowers for Wishes Event. However, for your PYO pleasure, approximately 3 acres are planted with 15-18 cut flower varieties of pollenless sunflowers. To be held this year on July 23-31, 2022, the 9-day festival is totally geared to benefiting Make-a-Wish Foundation of CT, an organization that grants life-changing wishes for children with critical illnesses. Moving into their twentieth year hosting the fundraiser, Buttonwood Farm figures they've raised a total of \$2 million in donations for this incredibly good cause.

Dedicated to making the event accessible to everyone, Duane says, “There's no admission fee to the farm and no parking fee. We have sunflower fields for viewing and taking pictures. If you want to spread out a blanket and have a picnic, nobody is going to ask you for a donation. But there is a suggested \$2.00 donation per person for admission into the cutting field plus a \$2.00 per stem donation for cutting.” And here's another highlight for those who build up an appetite while finding the sunflower of their dreams: The farm is famed for Kim Button's ice cream (she's Duane's wife) with 60+ lip smacking flavors, like Peppermint Stick, Almond Coconut, and Strawberry Cheesecake. But again, “Nobody is going to look at you cross-eyed if you don't buy ice cream,” Duane promises. Another promise: You are going to have a ball. **Go to www.buttonwoodfarmicecream.com for more information.** 📍

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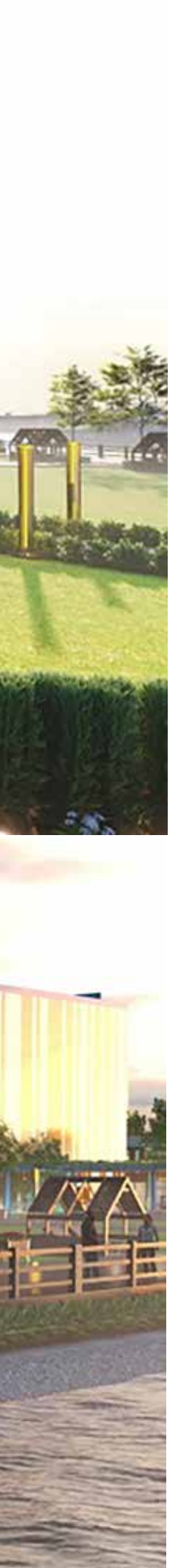
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New future home of
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JAIGANTIC STUDIO: WHERE HEROES RISE

Connecticut's First Major Motion Picture Studio
Coming to New Haven

By ANNA ZUCKERMAN-VDOVENKO /AZVPHOTOMEDIA.COM

When movie star, film director, producer, and disciplined martial artist Michael Jai White was growing up on the streets of Bridgeport, he may not have dreamed he'd be running the Tri-State area's first major-mini motion picture studio back in his home state of Connecticut one day. But as fate would have it, White has returned from Hollywood to bring creativity, optimism, and many future jobs to Greater New Haven area. He plans to build 25 large soundstages in the state and is implementing state-of-the-art virtual reality technology at their groundbreaking film studio in Shelton. White's big project is called Jaigantic Studios, a "play on words" that includes the fact that it will be a sizeable operation as well as the given middle name of Michael Jai White, Founder, and President.

THE A-TEAM

White's Hollywood expansion includes an experienced team of entertainment executives totally committed to bringing a successful, lucrative film studio to our state. This "A Team" is comprised of Hollywood veterans seasoned on the backlots of L.A. studios but ready for something new and different. Together, they represent the future of the Film and Television Industry in our state, an industry that formerly was limited to areas like L.A., New York, and Atlanta.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



The A-Team left to right: Donovan DeBoer: Founder and CEO of Jaigantic, Keith Shaw: Chief Studio Officer, Michael Jai White: President and Founder, Mayne Berke: Chief Financial Officer, and Jackie Buster: Founder and Chief Network Officer. Not pictured: Keith Smith, Director of Photography. Photo by **Rodney Dabney**

WHY CONNECTICUT?

Fortunately, Connecticut has made it financially attractive in terms of making it possible for creative film companies to come here by limiting taxes and giving some leeway in terms of incentives. White's visionary impetus is to empower people from his home state with production training and "soup to nuts" guidance on how to become gainfully employed in the creative, inspirational world of the entertainment industry. He and his cadre of star-makers, funding geniuses, and advisors have already come very far in their quest to break ground for

the new site that will give Greater New Haven a financial and aesthetic facelift beyond anyone's wildest imaginations.

This spring, I sat down with Michael Jai White for an interview to find out how things were progressing at Jaigantic.

THE DREAM EVOLVES

Q: Can you explain how your dream to create a "major mini motion picture studio" in this area advanced so rapidly and what this means for our region?

A: "Actually, it started with me trying to get a few films done here. There

was a film that had a script I wrote called "Crossroads" that got great traction in Hollywood and was right at the point of getting produced. But then I said to myself: 'Wait a minute, since this was autobiographical in nature, I wanted to investigate what I can get going in Connecticut.' I began to develop a laundry list of services that would make it palatable to shoot here that I could take back to LA and say: 'Hey this is why I'd like to shoot the project here in Connecticut.' Well, knowing that, I started requesting help from local sources, such as assistance from my college (Central CT State

University), local police, politicians and government officials who cared about the future of Connecticut. I was deeply motivated because I had many other people that backed me up. Then, I found some locations that were open to being used as an indoor studio capacity. Well, going from that, I realized that if I found a spot big enough to accommodate the sets, what I'd be doing in essence (and leaving behind me after it was over) would be something that could be used over and over."

"I knew that demand for shooting space is very much sought after because of all the content that needs to be shot now from streaming platforms to everything else. So, I said to myself that this could become a big business here. One thing led to another, and the timing was just perfect because Connecticut began giving filmmakers a tax incentive to film in-state. They changed tax laws that made Connecticut attractive the same way Atlanta became a financially appealing place to film. It was fortuitous. Not only could I get a soundstage to be used over and over for what looks like a big demand in the next five to ten years, but I can also find a viable, centrally located place in Connecticut to create this new space. Connecticut is strategically that perfect place for a film studio."

What other factors helped you decide to move forward?

A: "I found out about the newest virtual reality digital technology on the forefront that happens to be something my partner, Donovan DeBoer, is very much a part of. All these things just coincided, so to build a studio made all the sense in the world. I definitely wanted to bring movie making

to Connecticut but previously didn't realize I had the capacity of taking the leadership in a studio situation. It just kept evolving to that moment where everything fell into place. Oddly enough, if it weren't for COVID-19, there would be no way I would have gotten this kind of talent behind me. Top people in Hollywood began stepping off of their roller coaster because they had to. They stepped off and realized they didn't have to be on somebody else's ride. We all began to think we could take more control in our artistic endeavors."

IMPACT ON THE STATE

White affirms he will always plan to keep the studio and sound stages they currently have in Shelton, even after they build out in Greater New Haven. He explained that there is no empty studio space in this country. There's pretty much a line-up, basically a queue around the corner for viable shooting space. White asserts that this urgent need for studio facilities is not going to change for quite some time. At the time of writing this article, Jaigantic plans to break ground in the

Greater New Haven region sometime this summer. As the facilities come online, over the next few years, Jaigantic is dedicated to employing several thousand people working in its 25 soundstages throughout the complex.

Jaigantic is committed to growing a workforce here in Connecticut. In order for a grass roots entertainment industry to flourish, a broad outreach needs to be cultivated. Jaigantic wants to find young people that would like to enter the trades as well as target colleges and engage students turning them into future employees. People that live in Connecticut and go to school here often leave the state to seek employment elsewhere, but Jaigantic's mission would involve giving those young people an opportunity to work in a very unique industry where they might just want to stick around.

For those who are passionate about creative production and deeply willing to give their time to learn, the studio has designed a training



"The Outlaw Johnny Black" starring White due for release soon.

program that will provide education for many people in Connecticut that seek to learn a trade in the film industry. The internships and apprenticeships will be available to applicants with and without college educations. Some evening classes in photography have already started at Jaigantic's Shelton studio free of charge. Keith Smith is already leading evening workshops in photography, lighting and special effects as a benefit to those who

White's projects nowadays primarily focus on celebrating the human condition in an optimistic, fun way using humor, allowing the audience to think deeply while being entertained.

participated in The Hero's Challenge Program launch last fall created for those interested in exploring production jobs.

AN OLD SITE WITH A NEW VISION

Jaigantic plans to break ground soon on River Street in Fair Haven, a town with a current population of 26,000 people. DeBoer explained that back in the day, Bigelow Boiler Works was a big industrial factory that employed most of the population of Fair

Haven. By the mid-1980s, the company closed its doors.

The studios plan to train a local workforce nearby where some people can literally walk to work. Their vision includes bringing back a kind of generational wealth, stability, and a feeling of community with good union jobs. The site in Fair Haven will be built on the Quinnipiac River in two phases. There is an urgency to get going on the build-out because there is a shortage of soundstages in the world while at the same time an explosion of content and venues for creative expression. Inquiries are already coming in as to when everything will be operational.

Jaigantic's production studio will create their own content but will also have the opportunity to rent out their soundstages

that offer turnkey services from pre-production to physical production of the movie or TV series as well as post-production with virtual production. This amounts to one-stop shopping for filmmakers, according to DeBoer, who states that creatives can stay for the entire process in-house. If they aren't shooting on the soundstages with the virtual reality LED lights that transport actors anywhere on the planet visually, they can be out on location in Connecticut.

MOTIVATING THEMATICS

White's projects nowadays primarily focus on celebrating the human condition in an optimistic, fun way using humor, allowing the audience to think deeply while being entertained. White believes strongly that he should look at what he wants to take on artistically from the standpoint of the consumer. He affirms that one of the best things about being back in Connecticut is that he no longer has to deal with Hollywood values as the ultimate measuring stick. He enjoys working with people here whose ideas align with his own core principles that he developed while growing up in our state.

White, like many other young people of his day in Bridgeport, grew up fast. He admittedly needed to sort through many incarnations as he embarked on his own hero's journey. During childhood and youth, White shuttled between Bridgeport (living with his mother) and Harlem (spending time with his father). Naturally gifted in the field of martial arts, White derived confidence and developed values from learning 10 different forms of self-defense and becoming an advanced black belt in each one.



Michael Jai White's expertise in Karate opened many doors to lifelong friendships and to the film industry.

JAIGANTIC STUDIOS



The Hero's Teams were part of an important outreach, a Challenge that drew diverse people together with the aim to create a short video highlighting a hero in their community. From left to right the front row with the hat is Albert Lucky, Preston Martinik, Kurtis "Unique" Gomez, Benn B.W. Pharr IV, Kyon Wilson, the back row Manuel Saldana, Joshua Aponte. Photo by **Ebony Mckelvey**

His education at Southern CT State University also forged his intellect and heart. White's personal outreach now includes speaking to youth groups and encouraging teens to find their own honorable path full of integrity for their individual highest good.

DO WHAT YOU LOVE ...

Much of the movie business in Hollywood has become more about money than anything else. White says: "I think you can be quite successful monetarily, but you can do so and entertain and teach as well." At one time, Hollywood carried those values especially back in the '70s when the people who were running the studios really loved what they created. That may be why the high quality of what was created is now being repeated in

retreads of movies that worked. I want to create movies like that, the kind that you'd want to re-watch and share with your family or close friends over a beer."

White also plans to do television, stating: "There was a time when television had morality in every show. But now, it's as far away from that morality as you can get. That's become the selling point. I know what worked before. The shock value and the low common denominator type of entertainment that we're being proffered on TV is just about people getting on a bandwagon and trying to cash in on trends that don't last. But I see that movies that really have something special to say are heralded. People are appreciative of a movie that has values and morality sewn into the

thematic fabric. Audiences want to see a path through difficulty, coming out on the other side where central characters experience some sense of victory."

Jaigantic is now in a place where they can turn out entertaining films and TV shows they are proud of. Production is in a position where they don't have to just churn out content. White will be planning to be in many of the Jaigantic films, but also will continue writing, directing, and producing. White's long-term plan is to expand his talents into the background behind the scenes. But for the moment, he'll definitely be in front of the camera, as he's not only responsible for Jaigantic Studios, but he has a very active global fan base to please. White's unrelenting goal will be to plant the seeds for harvesting

a generation of new talented actors, directors, and producers.

A MAN WITH A MISSION

Jaigantic seems to have a mission in the entertainment industry largely based upon Michael Jai White's strong and positive energy. Although we all come from different influences, the film entitled *Crossroads* that he plans to film here in Connecticut will depict how we are all a product of our influences. As he explained:

"A person doesn't become a drug dealer without somebody introducing that to a person, and someone else doesn't become a doctor without being exposed to that profession. My film will look at life showing that when you are at a certain crossroads where you move to the left, your life goes in one direction, but if you move to the right, it goes in another. My goal as a filmmaker and producer is as somebody who has lived this way and continues to do so every day. That is the freedom that I have by being a person who doesn't look at things

through margins. I am a person that really doesn't categorize people by their color, age, background, culture, sexual preference, or whatever. In this way and through this non-judgmental filter, I feel that I really have something to say. We also have to take responsibility for what we introduce to others and how we influence them."

GRASS ROOTS TALENT

Michael Jai White vows to seek out talent within Connecticut and the Tri-State Area. He hopes to draw outside the state only if he has to find certain skilled people he can't locate nearby. He says: "I have an agenda. I can get everything done in-house, then I'm going to be shouting out from the rafters! I want to have every excuse to brag about Connecticut." Jaigantic is also perfectly positioned to be able to draw from talent in the tri-state area if projects need more people. White thinks of Connecticut as his true home and the people he has known since his childhood as well as his colleagues at Jaigantic Studio like family. He

loves those ineffable moments where a streak of thought connects him straight back to his early years; feeling that continuity can't take place anywhere else but in Connecticut.

I recently found out that Michael's given middle name, Jai, actually means "Victory" in the ancient Sanskrit language. It's a bit of a mystery exactly whose idea it was to confer that unusual name upon Michael at birth, but it is clear to this author that there was a providential nature to the receipt of such a powerful title. It's a no brainer to predict that White's return to Connecticut will be a victory for all of us who want to see our state thrive, grow creatively, and give meaningful purpose to our youth who need new and exciting skills. White says: "When I cross that Connecticut line on the highway, I just smile, you know? I just immediately feel at home with so much joy in my heart." Welcome back home Michael Jai White, Jaigantic Studios' leader with a gigantic heart. ■



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The Azores:

An Island Destination Where People ‘Live the Good Life’

By MARY HAWKINS

Ever since life started to “normalize” over the past few months and we’re finally starting to put the COVID-19 pandemic behind us, it’s safe to say that travel is on everyone’s minds. After being cooped up and unable to jet off at a moment’s notice, people are more eager than ever to get back on the vacation bandwagon.

If the past two years have taught us anything, it’s that time is fleeting, and you have to take advantage of the opportunity to explore when you can get it. For many of us, that means stepping outside of our comfort zones and seeking out destinations that are full of adventure that go beyond renting a beach house on the New England coast. (Not that there’s anything wrong with that if that’s your cup of tea.) Often, this means employing the services of an expert in the travel field, someone like Fay Dehaas of Kreative World Travel, LLC., to help you find and plan the perfect vacation. And there’s one place in particular that she thinks you might not have heard of, or might not know a lot about, but should definitely travel to.

THE AZORES: SO FAR YET SO CLOSE

About a 5-hour direct flight from Boston or JFK, the Azores archipelago are a group of nine volcanically made islands that sit off the coast of Portugal, which are also owned by Portugal. According to Erika Gustafson of Quest Travel Adventures, an expert in travel to the Azores,

“If you were to draw a line from the northeast coast of the United States to Lisbon, travel two thirds of the way from Boston to Lisbon and you’d arrive in the Azores Islands.” The location is ideal, considering the Azores are part of Europe, yet it takes less time flying there from the east coast than getting to California or the west coast.

As a luxury travel planner, Fay Dehaas partners with travel experts from specific destinations to make sure her clients have the best experience. She has partnered with Quest Travel Adventures to create customized itineraries to this magical destination, unknown to most travelers. She notes, “Many times, the Azores are not in the picture, but then I hear my clients are looking for hiking, or a relaxing honeymoon, and the destination just fits.” And while some people book week-long vacations to these islands, the short duration of the flights, coupled with them being non-stop, make the Azores an easy long-weekend getaway as well.

UNDERSTATED LUXURY ON ISLAND TIME

It’s important to keep in mind that while the Azores are, in fact, islands, they’re volcanic, so they don’t have miles of pristine beaches like islands in the Caribbean. As Gustafson explains, “This is not a destination to go to if you want to sip your pina colada on a beach. The Azores are about being outdoors, living the good life, and being totally relaxed, with everything just

slowing down. There is no hurry in the Azores.”

On top of being a place where life is truly lived on “island time,” Gustafson also describes the vibe of the Azores as “being in Europe 20 years ago.” While all the hotels do have modern conveniences like WiFi, don’t expect the 5-star luxury that you’re used to finding at a Ritz Carlton or Four Seasons. They have so many environmental rules in the Azores because it is an outdoor and a nature destination, so building a new hotel is challenging. This is not a destination where you’re going to find a Marriott, or a Sheraton, or Hilton.

However, the lack of name-brand hotels doesn’t mean you won’t wind up with a gorgeous ocean-view room or a boutique property along cobble streets in the old town. You’ll just find more of an understated, less fussy experience in this laid-back destination. Gustafson notes, “The islands are known for nature and outdoors, adventure, food, wine, and relaxation, just the slower pace of life.” She adds, “A 5-star property in the Azores celebrates luxury, just in a different way. You might have a balcony that’s facing the ocean, or maybe you have a hammock that’s on the balcony, or perhaps there’s a little natural bathing pool out in front where they’ve carved it out from the lava rock. It feels higher-end, but without the higher-end prices.”

She goes on to explain that while most people visit the island of São Miguel, there’s an opportunity to island hop as well. She says,

"The flights from the U.S. come into the main island, which is São Miguel, and that is where a lot of our tours are, because a lot of people can see a lot in a long weekend getaway for four or five nights. And then from there, if you have more time and want to visit other islands, or perhaps have heritage that you want to research to see where your family came from, you can fly to some of the other islands."

"Each island has its own characteristic. The main island of São Miguel is called the Green Island. It could rain every single day of the year and that's why it's so green. Very green. Often it rains for half an hour in the morning and then is sunny the rest of the day. There is always something in bloom. And it's just gorgeous to be outside," Gustafson says.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

While the Azores might be a wonderful place to go to unplug and unwind, there's no shortage of activities and adventures to suit everyone's tastes. The islands have a mild climate, to the point where even in the winter months, the temperature doesn't drop below about 45 degrees Fahrenheit. The weather makes it an ideal spot for hiking, kayaking, canyoning, rappelling, biking, canoeing, or just exploring the old cobblestone streets of the islands' towns.

Kreative World Travel LLC., in partnership with Quest Travel Adventures, offers several different itineraries to choose from, including spa getaways, cultural exploration, nature lovers' hiking excursions, and even an island culinary experience.

Gustafson notes, "Two of our most popular itineraries are in the active sector. Nature Lovers Hiking is a four-night program that has three hikes exploring different parts of the island. Then there's the Azores Adventure Seeker, which has three different activities in

the week - kayaking or canoeing, hiking and biking. We can also add a whale and dolphin watching boat excursion to round out the week."

For those who want to kick things up a notch, there's also the opportunity to go canyoning and rappelling. She explains, "Canyoning and rappelling is basically where they outfit you in a wetsuit, then you hike up to a point in the forest where the river beds have carved out a pathway. Then you hike down along these river beds, and when you get to the waterfalls, you either rappel down them if they're bigger ones, or the guides might tell you to just jump! Gustafson went on the adventure herself on a recent trip and says, "It was harder than I expected, but it was amazing. It was exhilarating. I felt like I was in the middle of nowhere. It's not something I've ever done in any other location that I've been to."

The Azores are also becoming quite the destination for foodies. "All the food is local. Not only do they have the ocean around them, but they raise cattle on the island both for beef and dairy production, milk, yogurt, and cheese.

Each of the islands make cheese and they all have their own kind of cheese they're known for," she explains.

"The semi-hard cheese from São Jorge Island is probably the best known."

Gustafson also highlights another perk of all the food grown and produced locally in the islands, "When you go to sit down and eat a meal, almost everything you're eating has come from the Azores, which means that food is cheap. So generally, your most expensive part of your trip to the Azores is going to be your airfare."



ALWAYS USE A TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL

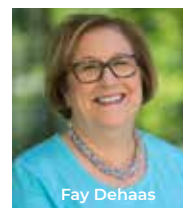
Even though so many of us are accustomed to booking our own trips online these days, when you're considering a lesser-known destination like the Azores, doing your research and consulting people who are well-versed and familiar with the location, like Gustafson and Dehaas can make for a much more seamless experience.

Just as you're more likely to check out a new restaurant if someone recommends it to you, talking to someone who knows the ins and outs of a destination like the Azores takes out most of the guesswork. DeHaas explains, "I think in this day and age, I am getting a lot of new clients that realize that there's so much information they need to know, especially through the pandemic and moving forward, that they want a sense of security. And are they taking care of their entire trip? Do they have their travel insurance?" She adds that there "are a lot of moving pieces" when it comes to planning a vacation. This is why it's so important to do your homework and to seek help if you want to be sure you have all your ducks in a row.

TAKE THE LEAP

The list of reasons why the Azores is a fabulous vacation spot for people of all ages goes on and on. Between its proximity to the east coast of the United States, the wide range of activities and attractions offered on the islands, and the fact that you get a whole lot of bang for your buck in a relaxed, safe,

somewhat undiscovered environment, the only thing holding you back from your dream vacation is the short plane ride to get there. (What are you waiting for?)



Fay Dehaas



For more information about the Azores, visit questtraveladventures.com, and to book, contact Fay Dehaas at 860-206-8244 or fdehaas@cruiseplanners.com.



Dr. Sanjay Mittal and patient navigator Brooke Medel with a model patient in UConn Health's outpatient stroke clinic.

UConn Health Stroke Program

By ALIX BOYLE / Photography by TINA ENCARNACION

UConn Health recently received certification as an advanced thrombectomy-capable stroke center. It's the first such program in the greater Hartford area and only the second in Connecticut.

This means that patients will receive the fastest, most comprehensive care possible.

In the case of a stroke, a thrombectomy is a minimally invasive surgery to remove a blood clot from an artery in the brain.

"Our multidisciplinary team includes neurocritical care intensivists, neuro-interventionalists, neurosurgeons, vascular neurologists, and a stroke nurse navigator," said Dr. Sanjay Mittal, a neurologist and medical director of the stroke center. "This collaboration can really optimize patient outcomes. Additionally, our EMS partners are such a strength of the program."

There are two types of strokes. Ischemic strokes account for the vast majority and occur when clots block the blood vessels to the brain and cut off blood flow. Hemorrhagic strokes happen when the wall of a blood vessel breaks and blood leaks into the brain.

Not all hospitals are equal when it comes to stroke care. Some hospitals are only capable of stabilizing patients until they can be treated at another hospital that offers appropriate care. Others are considered capable of caring for stroke patients, and a few, like UConn Health, offer the full spectrum of treatments.

"Time is brain," said Jennifer Sposito, a nurse who is the clinical coordinator of the stroke program. "This special certification that we recently received is great for our population because people need to get quick care near where they live. We want to save whatever brain function we can. Time could mean the difference between a severe disability or a minor one or the ability to walk and talk."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36



Nurse Jennifer Sposito is the UConn Health Stroke Center's clinical program coordinator.



UConn John Dempsey Hospital EMS coordinator Peter Canning discusses a case with Jonathan Torres from Simsbury EMS in the emergency department.



Dr. Gracia Mui and Dr. Sanjay Mittal from the UConn Health Stroke Center review a scan in the emergency department.

At UConn Health, stroke care begins when emergency medical services (EMS) arrives for the patient. UConn John Dempsey Hospital receives stroke patients from 15 different towns and ambulance services, so there's a big emphasis on training first responders about recognizing the signs and symptoms of a stroke.

UConn Health publishes a monthly newsletter for the first responders including information on strokes, and all are required to earn continuing medical education credits.

For example, there's a reminder that even though

patients are not presenting with classic symptoms, they may still have had a stroke. Those include "sudden altered mental status, vision disturbances, and/or altered equilibrium/vertigo," according to the newsletter.

"We are equal partners in our patients' care," said Peter Canning, a paramedic, nurse, and EMS coordinator for UConn Health. "There's a big emphasis on quality assurance. The sooner the EMS recognizes it's a stroke, the better the patient's outcome."

The ambulance aims to arrive within 8 minutes of the 911 call and spend no more than 15 minutes on scene. Once the paramedic determines the patient may be having a suspected stroke, they call the hospital with a "STROKE ALERT" so that when the patient arrives, they can be brought directly to CT scan on the EMS stretcher. "The team is standing by to swarm the patient," Canning said.

If the CT scan shows evidence of a clot, the patient may be prescribed the clot-busting drug tPA (tissue plasminogen activator). This must be administered within three to four and a half hours of the onset of the stroke.

Or, depending on where in the brain the stroke is located, the patient may be a candidate for a thrombectomy. "Our teams decide which treatment to use following the latest literature, research, and guidelines outlined by experts in the field and also as recommended by the American Heart/American Stroke Association," Sposito said.

UConn Health offers a free stroke education symposium every year for first responders and health care providers. During COVID-19, the event was held virtually.

As the population ages, stroke is only going to become more common, and it's important for all of us to learn the

signs and symptoms, Canning said.

Sposito recommends learning the BE FAST acronym. Call 911 if you suspect someone is having a stroke.

Balance – Watch for a sudden loss of balance.

Eyes – Check for vision loss.

Face – Look for an uneven smile.

Arm – Check if one arm is weak.

Speech – Listen for slurred speech.

Time – Call 911. Time is of the essence in treating stroke.

"UConn Health publishes a monthly newsletter for first responders including information on strokes, and all are required to earn continuing medical education credits."

There are also numerous medical conditions and lifestyle choices that are personal risk factors for stroke. These include atrial fibrillation, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, prior stroke, alcohol use, smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity.


"Back in 2013 we realized our community needed stroke care," Sposito said. "The first stroke alert was in 2014." A stroke alert is a standardized protocol for how a hospital treats stroke patients.

"Ever since then, we have been growing the program and striving for excellence. We've had many additions to our team including a neurocritical care intensivist. We continued to grow, added a neurosurgeon and a neuroradiologist, and in 2017, we did the first thrombectomy. Now there are two providers who can perform endovascular thrombectomy."

Since 2017, UConn Health has performed more than 100 thrombectomies and currently does two or three a month.

Mittal, the director of the program, cares for hospitalized stroke patients. Additionally, he works on stroke prevention and manages patients with post-stroke muscle spasticity.

This certification from the Joint Commission is important because it lets patients know that the UConn Health stroke program has reached the highest level of quality and safety. UConn John Dempsey Hospital has also earned the "Gold Plus" designation for the past six years from the American Heart Association's "Get With the Guidelines" program for top-quality stroke care.

"There are a select few programs who demonstrate top care," Sposito said. "It speaks very highly of our staff and for our global drive of patient safety and quality improvement." 

ADVANCED STROKE CARE AT UConn Health.

UConn Health's renowned Stroke Center has earned certification as an Advanced Thrombectomy-Capable Stroke Center by The Joint Commission. UConn Health is only the second Advanced Thrombectomy-Capable Stroke Center in Connecticut and the first in the Hartford region.

A cerebral thrombectomy is a minimally invasive surgery that removes a blood clot from an artery in the brain. During a stroke, this procedure can help to salvage brain tissue if delivered quickly. UConn Health's stroke experts are standing by 24/7 to assess and treat stroke patients rapidly. Visit our website to learn more about this life-saving procedure and how to recognize the signs of a stroke.



health.uconn.edu/stroke

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Specs for Little Heroes:

Helping Child Eye Cancer Survivors One Pair of Glasses at a Time

By MARY HAWKINS / Photographed by CARLA HERNANDEZ TEN EYCK

When it comes to childhood cancers, retinoblastoma probably isn't one that's on most people's radar. Retinoblastoma is a rare cancer that begins in the back part of the eye, the retina, and can spread up the optic nerve and into the brain. It affects 1 in 10,000 kids each year, and it only occurs in children ages 5 and under. In 2011, at the age of just 3, Erin and Adam LaFleche's son, Justin, became one of those 1 in 10,000.

Justin's Story

"We noticed a white glare in his eye and didn't really think anything of it," Erin explains. She continues, "We thought maybe his eyes were continuing to change colors, and maybe they would turn green, like Adam's. He was acting perfectly healthy, so we really didn't think it was an issue, and certainly nothing like retinoblastoma was on our radar. But then, we saw it again, and I told Adam, 'I feel like I see something funny in his eye.'"

The couple took Justin to the pediatrician, who kind of "brushed it off like it was nothing" and made Erin feel like she was being a nervous mom. At the advice of Erin's mother, she and Adam decided it was a good idea to seek out a second opinion, just to be on the safe side. They were referred to a pediatric ophthalmologist, and that appointment proved to be the day their lives changed forever.

Erin recalls the moment they received the worst news of their lives. After

examining Justin, she explains, "The doctor came back into the office and said, 'He's blind in that eye, it looks like the retina's possibly detached. It's either Crohn's disease or retinoblastoma.'" It all seemed so surreal to Erin at the time. She recalls, "I couldn't believe what I was hearing," and she was so stunned, she even got sick in the wastepaper basket in the doctor's office.

A few days later, they took Justin to see Dr. Miguel Materin, Ocular Oncologist at Yale New Haven Hospital,



who confirmed that Justin did indeed have retinoblastoma. They were told that Justin would need to have enucleation surgery to have his eye removed immediately before the cancer spread to his brain. As you can imagine, they were in complete shock, so the family traveled to New York City to Sloan Kettering Hospital to get a second opinion. Doctors there echoed Dr. Materin's advice, and Erin and Adam opted to return to Yale New Haven to have the surgery performed by Yale's

Ocular Surgeon, Dr. Flora Levin.

On the day of the enucleation surgery, the couple remained as calm, cool, and collected as possible for Justin's sake. Erin notes, "We just tried to focus on the fact that we were ridding him of cancer and tried not to be too emotional about him losing his eye."

Little did they know just how brave and resilient this amazing kid would turn out to be. Erin adds, "He just showed us how to do it," meaning getting through the aftermath of what had just happened. She adds, "You know, everyone says, 'Oh, you guys are so strong.' But we aren't. You just do what you have to do. You put one foot in front of the other. And that's how Justin was. It was a day surgery, and he didn't even sleep over in the hospital. He came back home with a big patch over where his eye used to be. And by the next day, he wanted to race around on his John Deere tractor. And we said, 'Justin, slow down, slow down!' And at 3 ½, he said, 'Mommy, slow makes me sad, fast makes me happy.' And that's just his motto for life."

There was a specific day after the surgery where Erin was having a particularly hard time, as she was mourning the loss of Justin's eye and was still in shock at what had happened. Her daughter, Juliana, was just 5 years old at the time and noticed her crying and wanted to comfort her. She came to her and said, "Mommy, you know, God gives you two eyes. Because if something happens to one, you have the other. God gives you two ears because if something happens to one, you have the



Justin LaFleche today



Erin, Adam, Justin, and Juliana LaFleche

other.” It was as if she was telling her mom, “Don’t worry, Justin’s gonna be fine.” And fine he was and still is. Now 14, Justin is not only cancer-free, but he’s an athlete who loves skiing, hiking, soccer, and lacrosse.

How Specs for Little Heroes Was Born

When kids lose an eye to retinoblastoma, it’s even more crucial to protect their still existing eye, and that’s why they’re outfitted with a special pair of glasses. These glasses have to have polycarbonate lenses, which won’t crack or shatter, to ensure the remaining eye is protected.

Erin and Adam took Justin to the optical shop to get his special glasses, and that’s when they found out they weren’t covered by insurance. Erin recalls, “I was still in a really bitter part of my life. I thought, ‘What do you mean they’re not covered? My kid only has one eye! This is ridiculous.’ And then I started to think, ‘Wow. There are

maybe some people who don’t have the means to pay out of pocket. These kids deserve the Mercedes of glasses, let alone not being able to afford them at all.’”

Not too long after that day, an idea popped into Erin’s mind. She explains, “Faith has always been a really important thing to me, but it comes in waves. And I really feel like God sent me a message about this idea for Specs for Little Heroes because I was really having a hard time with everything. I just couldn’t handle the fact that he lost his eye. I just missed it. I was like, ‘Why him? He’s gonna have to go through life with a prosthetic eye.’ I think God gave me the idea that, maybe you can take this experience and do something to help other people.”

And that’s how Specs for Little Heroes came about. Specs is a nonprofit organization that raises money to cover the cost of these special glasses for children who have lost their eye to retinoblastoma. When it first got up

and running, Erin posted about Specs in a Facebook group for moms of kids who have retinoblastoma, hoping the organization could help a few children. At first, Erin and Adam’s goal was simply to outfit 10 kids with a pair of glasses. In the years since Specs was started, they’ve more than exceeded that goal. They’ve gifted over 500 pairs of glasses, and they’re helping children all over the world.

“We’ve sent glasses to the Philippines, Vietnam, England, Switzerland, the United States, Canada, and Mexico, and through that, we’ve met the most amazing people,” Erin explains. But it’s not just the gift of the glasses that makes Specs for Little Heroes such an important source of support for families. She continues, “We feel really proud that we are giving the gift of glasses, but because it’s coming from a mom whose son had retinoblastoma, we can offer these families so much moral support.”

Nobody knows what these families

are going through better than two parents who have been through it themselves and who also have a child who is now cancer-free and thriving. Parents who connect with Erin and Adam can not only share their own stories and feelings about what they're experiencing, but hearing about how well Justin is doing serves as a reminder that they will get through this difficult time in their lives. Erin adds, "Specs for Little Heroes has been something where we are able to give them that concrete first pair of glasses, but sometimes, it's not even the money. It's that they don't even know what just hit them because it happens so quickly. They don't even know where to look for glasses, but we're here to help and let them know what they need."

Specs has become such an incredible community of people who continue to support and uplift each other. "Oftentimes, when the cloud lifts, they come back and they donate back to us. They'll say, 'For Johnny's birthday, in lieu of presents, everyone is donating to Specs for Little Heroes,'" notes Erin.

There's a Lesson to Be Learned in Everything We Experience

Erin describes the efforts made by Specs for Little Heroes as, "healing work," for lack of a better word, and she notes that being able to help so many children has made Justin's experience less difficult to come to terms with.

The Specs logo is original artwork drawn by a family friend, and it depicts two children wearing glasses. Erin points out, "We made it a point not to put Justin's face on the logo or make it about him. He doesn't want any sympathy, but we want to show him that when something bad happens to you, you can push through it and help other people – and helping other people has helped us heal. It's made us see how a lot of people have it a lot worse than you and giving to others makes it all feel a little less difficult."

As Specs for Little Heroes has grown over the years, Erin and Adam have

If there's one piece of advice that Erin could give to parents, it's to always trust your gut if you think there might be something wrong with your child.

since formed partnerships with three eyeglass manufacturers who make people's donations stretch so they can buy more glasses and help more kids in need. When someone donates \$100, they're able to purchase \$200 worth of glasses. Through personal donations, events, and fundraisers, the organization shows no signs of stopping as they continue to help children all over the world recover after enucleation surgery.

Always Trust Your Gut


If there's one piece of advice that Erin could give to parents, it's to always trust your gut if you think there might be something wrong with your child. She says, "Don't blame the doctor, but don't let a doctor dismiss your gut instinct. If you feel like something's not right, don't hesitate to speak up and ask

for a referral to a specialist. And when you're going through something, just know that there are people out there who truly care for you and will support you."

Erin continues, "It's all about paying it forward. People were there for us. They embraced us and literally carried us through when we felt like we couldn't even take a step forward. And then when we were out of our dark place, to be able to take an idea and create the support system like we have with Specs for Little Heroes makes it not feel so in vain."

It's also important to note just how serious and fast-moving a cancer retinoblastoma is, and it only develops in children who are ages 1 to 5. Unfortunately, it's not something that all pediatricians will look for or test for. Parents should keep in mind the phrase, "Know the glow." If you happen to notice a glare or light in your child's eye, it's not something that should be taken lightly. Call your doctor and make an appointment to have their eyes examined right away. As Erin says, "Moms need to be vigilant about being their child's best advocate and having their eyes checked."

For any parents who have a child going through any sort of illness or health challenge, Erin has some words to live by. "As we tell Justin, if you can get through this, you can probably get through anything. You just try to keep your kid strong and know that everybody has a hurdle. And if we all try to help each other, then you know we can get through whatever it is."

The LaFleches are longtime residents of Ellington, Connecticut. Donations to help purchase glasses for children with retinoblastoma can be made through the Specs for Little Heroes website, www.specsforlittleheroes.com.



A Specs recipient shows off her glasses.



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DELICIOUS

22 CONNECTICUT SEAFOOD PLACES TO TRY IN '22





By AMY S. WHITE

rilled, fried, baked, broiled, steamed, or raw, seafood is the go-to food of summertime. With so much of our great state on or close enough to the shoreline, there are plenty of options to enjoy the freshest, locally caught fish and shellfish available. Here are twenty-two of the best seafood places from across the state for you to enjoy all summer long. Some are seasonal, and most have outdoor seating with water views. We've also included three recipes that show that cooking seafood at home is not the daunting task it seems to be.

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

Maine Fish Market and Restaurant
60 Bridge Street, East Windsor.

Maine Fish is located in one of the oldest commercial buildings in East Windsor; it dates back to the 1790s. Their most recent renovation/expansion includes a much larger dining room and beautiful outdoor eating area. The extensive menu offers seafood cooked every way and in just about any combination possible.

You can also purchase local seafood at market price at their retail counter.

MUST TRY: *Maine Seafood Market's Famous Fried Seafood Platter of fried shrimp, pollock, whole-belly clams, scallops, and seafood salad served with a salad and two sides.*

Mickey's Oceanic Grill
119 Pitkin Street,
East Hartford.

An institution since 1953, this diner serves its seafood specialties with counter ordering and mostly outside tables. Besides some of the best fried seafood around, they serve breakfast and lunch with plenty of non-seafood options like burgers and hot dogs. Watch for specials like LobsterFest Thursday, Friday and Saturday, when lobster rolls are buy 2 save \$5, buy 4 save \$10. **MUST TRY:** *Fried Fish Sandwich.*

Donahue's Clam Castle
1324 Boston Post Road, Madison.

This seasonal shoreline spot has been serving seafood-shack favorites just down the street from Hammonasset Beach for sixty years. It's BYOB and dog-friendly, with indoor and outdoor seating, and award-winning clam chowder. You might even catch a glimpse of Chef Jacques Pepin who is known to be a fan. **MUST TRY:** Scallop Taco—fried, broiled, or blackened wild-caught scallops with pico de gallo, cilantro, cabbage slaw, and lime crema.

Saybrook Fish House—2165 Silas Deane Highway, Rocky Hill.

At this busy restaurant in Rocky Hill, you can enjoy a complete meal of your choice of seafood entrée served with warm bread, salad, and a fresh fruit basket. Besides their dinner options, Saybrook Fish offers a lighter lunch menu, early bird specials, a children's menu, and a lounge menu that make this a popular family dining spot. **MUST TRY:** *Surf and Turf of three baked stuffed shrimp served alongside grilled Angus sirloin.*

**Primavera Pub
271 Newington Avenue, Hartford.**

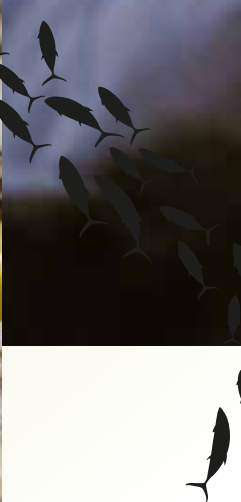
While this Portuguese-American restaurant is not a seafood place *per se*, their seafood dishes are well-known and beloved. Clams, shrimp, cod, and other seafood options can be found in both their appetizer and entrée lists often served in flavorful wine sauces that will make you think you're jet-setting on Portugal's Silver Coast. **MUST TRY:** *Pasta Primavera—Sauteed shrimp and steamed clams with white wine and garlic over pasta.*

**Max Fish
110 Glastonbury Boulevard, Glastonbury.**

For a more upscale seafood experience, visit Max Restaurant Group's Max Fish. Their extensive raw bar is nearly unparalleled and includes sampler, hi-rise, and "skyscraper" options. Seafood is highlighted on their lunch, dinner, happy hour "shark bites," and brunch menus, which include appetizers, entrees, and poke bowls. **MUST TRY:** *Bouillabaisse—shrimp, mussels, clams, and hake in a saffron broth with roasted fennel and tomato and saffron rouille.*

**Lenny's Indian Head Inn
205 South Montowese Street,
Branford.**

This bustling family-owned spot is popular with locals, visitors, and boaters who flock to its outdoor deck and "boat bar" that offer a beautiful view of Sybil Marsh. From lobster bisque and clam chowder to fried and broiled seafood to hot and cold lobster rolls, Lenny's has it all. Their





“takeout trays” are great for parties and picnics, too. **MUST TRY:** *Ultra-local Montowese Cove oysters.*

The Place Restaurant
901 Boston Post Road
Guilford.

What began with a sailor hosting an informal clambake along Route 1 has become perhaps the most unusual restaurant on our list. The Place opens for the season in May and closes in late October. Visitors sit on tree stumps around bright red painted tables while cooks roast clams, lobsters, and corn on

the cob over an 18-foot open fire pit. The a la carte menu is posted, and guests are invited to BYOB along with their own side dishes, tablecloths, and candles. A truly unique experience. **MUST TRY:** *Roast Clam Special—littleneck clams bathed in a cocktail sauce and butter mixture then roasted directly over the fire.*

CT Chowder Co.
268 Quinnipiac Avenue,
North Haven.

As the name implies, chowder is a staple at this newcomer. That said, there are

several other distinctive options on this place’s menu, including a surf and turf burger (stuffed with cheese and topped with lobster), lobster pot pie served in a bread bowl, cod fish Reuben, and specials that change weekly. **MUST TRY:** *CT Clam Chowder—a hearty mix of New England, Rhode Island, and Manhattan clam chowders.*

Oyster Club
13 Water Street, Mystic.

With its zinc bar and roomy deck, Mystic’s Oyster Club delivers boat-to-table fine dining from a seasonal

menu that features locally sourced ingredients. The in-house butcher cuts sustainably and locally raised meats, and the raw bar menu features clams and oysters from CT, RI, and NY. For obvious reasons, the menu changes often. **MUST TRY:** *Oysters Rockefeller made with creamed spinach, sourdough breadcrumbs, and Finback Cheese from The Mystic Cheese Company.*

Lenny and Joe's Fish Tale
86 Boston Post Road, Westbrook or
1301 Boston Post Road, Madison.

With two locations, Lenny and Joe's is the shoreline favorite for its countless "fin-atics." The Westbrook location has both a dining room and enclosed heated porch while the one in Madison features an indoor dining room, outdoor picnic area, and a carousel whose proceeds go to charitable causes. The menus and hours vary by location, so check online before you go. **MUST TRY:** *Fried Whole Belly Clam Dinner.*

Bill's Seafood
548 Boston Post Road, Westbrook.

Shoreline seafood fans gather at Bill's near the "singing" bridge to feast on seafood and more at the outside picnic tables and dining room overlooking the Patchogue River. The menu is wide-ranging and includes a steamed and raw bar as well as fried seafood platters, sandwiches, and Italian-inspired seafood entrees. Try to save room for a visit to the ice cream and gift shop. This is a cash-only restaurant. **MUST TRY:** *Bill's Own Seafood Platter with shrimp, clam strips, scallops, cod, French fries, onion rings, and cole slaw.*

Fresh Salt
2 Bridge Street, Old Saybrook. Fresh Salt serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner at the Saybrook Point Resort and Marina. Diners come to enjoy local, seasonal seafood and other specialties with a breathtaking view of Long Island Sound. There is indoor and outdoor dining as well as the Fresh Salt Porch, which are the most longed-for seats. **MUST TRY:** *Lobster Pot Pie—lobster, shrimp, scallops, asparagus, carrots, leeks, tarragon, and lobster cream sauce in puff pastry.*

Captain Scott's Lobster Dock
80 Hamilton Street, New London.

Another seasonal favorite, Captain Scott's has plenty of outdoor seating in the sun or under their

large pavilion on Shaw's Cove. Fans rave about their hot lobster roll, which comes in two sizes, with plenty of lobster meat drenched in hot butter with a sprinkle of Old Bay on a perfectly soft bun. BYOB and hours, especially in spring, can change depending on the weather, so call ahead. **MUST TRY:** *Clam fritters.*

Shell and Bones Oyster Bar and Grill
100 South Water Street, New Haven.

Shell and Bones offers waterfront dining amidst romantic fireplaces in historic City Point. That it is CT's only restaurant acknowledged by the James Beard Foundation for being "Committed to the goal of the Smart Catch Program" proves their dedication to serving only fresh and sustainable seafood. Their daily selection of boutique farm-to-table oysters is as dazzling as the view.

MUST TRY: *Alaskan black garlic cod with bok choy, bamboo tacu tacu, and ginger lemongrass broth.*

Lobster Landing
152 Commerce Street, Clinton.

A seafood shack at its very core, Lobster Landing sits at a marina, is decorated with buoys, and has crushed clamshells instead of pavement. It lacks pretension as well as an actual website, but the service is fast and friendly, and the lobster rolls are rumored to be among the state's best. Dog-friendly and BYOB.

MUST TRY: *Lobster roll—¼ lb. hot lobster meat on a toasted sub roll with lemon and melted butter.*

Ford's Lobster
15 Riverview Avenue, Noank.

What was once a small gas dock and bait shop is now a bustling seafood restaurant with both indoor and outdoor seating on the water in Noank. Ford's is open year-round (except February), is pet-friendly, BYOB, and does not accept reservations. The wait is worth it, however, for the views, the ambience, and the famous bisque bomb. **MUST TRY:** *Bisque Bomb—½ lb. hot lobster meat served in a bread bowl and topped with creamy lobster bisque.*



**S and P Oyster
Restaurant and Bar
1 Holmes Street, Mystic.**

New England meets South America at this chic hot spot on the Mystic River. The food here is perfectly seasoned, beautifully presented, and skillfully served by a top-notch staff, several of whom have been there more than a decade. Catch the scent of the wood fired grill as you savor some of Mystic's best cuisine, all with a view of the town's famous drawbridge. ***MUST TRY: Seafood Paella—monkfish, shrimp, mussels, little neck clams, Spanish chorizo, and Bomba rice.***

**The Whelk
575 Riverside Avenue,
Westport.**

This seafood restaurant and bar on the Saugatuck River has an ever-changing menu featuring sustainable seafood and local produce. Find buck-a-shuck Copp's Island oysters during happy hour (starting at 4:30 Tuesday-Friday). While you're there, indulge in grilled octopus, a rarity in this state's seafood scene. ***MUST TRY: Deviled eggs with fried oysters and pickled onions.***

**The Fish Market
1307 West Main Street,
Willimantic.**

Eastern CT's best retail seafood market, The Fish Market also carries prepared seafood lunches and dinners for takeout. Soups including chowder, gumbo, and bisque are available by the pint or quart. The menu also has fried seafood platters, rolls, and sides. ***MUST TRY: Fish and chips.***



Flanders Fish Market and Restaurant, 22 Chesterfield Road, East Lyme.

A second-generation, family-run business, this restaurant and retail market runs buck-a-shucks from 3-5 daily, and a \$7 fish and chip special on Tuesdays. The market carries fresh fish and shellfish, as well as offerings from the restaurant such as their lauded lobster pot pie, soups, dips, seafood salads, and their own “Tears of Joy” cocktail sauce. They do catering and clambakes too. **MUST TRY:** *Cappy’s Combo—crab cake, shrimp, stuffed clam, stuffed flounder, stuffed shrimp, fish filet, and bay scallops served blackened or broiled with a choice of side.*

City Fish 884 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield.

Recognized as one of the best fresh fish markets in southern New England, City Fish is retail, wholesale, restaurant, and takeout counter all in one. They have been delivering the highest quality seafood products throughout the state for over 85 years. Their extensive website includes FAQs and recipes along with their vast seafood offerings. **MUST TRY:** *Soft Shell Crab Sandwich (available from April to August).* 🐟

Curried Mussels with Coconut and Lemongrass Appetizer (Serves 2-4)

Ingredients:

- ½ tablespoon olive oil**
- 1 ½ tablespoons red curry paste**
- 1 cup hot water**
- 1 stalk lemongrass, chopped**
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh ginger**
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce**
- ½ tablespoon sugar**
- 1 13.5-ounce can light coconut milk**
- 2 pounds fresh mussels**

Directions:

Heat the olive oil in a large pot. Add the curry paste and stir to heat for about one minute. Stir in the water, then add the lemongrass, ginger, fish sauce, sugar, and coconut milk. Bring to a boil, then turn heat to low to simmer for 15 minutes. Add the mussels, stir to coat, then put a lid on the pot. Cook, covered, over low heat until all the mussels open, about five minutes. Serve with crusty bread.

Sweet Chili and Coconut Corn and Shrimp Soup (Serves 4-6)

Ingredients:

3 ears fresh corn
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 onion, diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 teaspoon ground coriander
2 cups chicken or vegetable broth
1 13.5-ounce can light coconut milk
3 tablespoons sweet chili sauce
Juice of one lime
Kosher salt, to taste
1 lb. cooked frozen shrimp, thawed and roughly chopped
Chopped cilantro for garnish

Directions:

Shuck the corn and remove the kernels from the cob. Set aside, keeping the cobs. Heat the oil in a large pot. Add the diced onions and cook until translucent. Stir in the garlic and coriander and cook about one minute. Stir in the broth and coconut milk. Add the corn kernels and the cobs and bring to a boil over medium high heat. Lower heat and simmer for two minutes. Remove and discard the corn cobs. Add the sweet chili sauce, lime juice, and salt. Use an immersion blender to thicken slightly, then add the chopped shrimp. Garnish with chopped cilantro.

Individual Lobster Pot Pies (Makes 6)

Ingredients:

2 1.25-lb. lobsters
Water for cooking lobsters and for making stock
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
¼ cup minced shallots
¼ cup brandy
1 tablespoon flour
½ cup milk
½ cup heavy cream
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1 teaspoon dried thyme
½ teaspoon dried tarragon
¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
¼ teaspoons cayenne pepper
1 green onion (scallion), chopped
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
1 package Pepperidge Farm Puff Pastry Shells

Directions:

To cook the lobster and make the stock:

Fill a large pot about two inches high with water. Add a small handful of kosher or sea salt. Bring the water to a full boil. Grasp a lobster around the abdomen, behind the claws, and lower it into the pot, head-first. Put the second lobster in the pot. Immediately cover the pot and let the lobsters steam for about 12 minutes, until outer shell is bright red and meat is white, not opaque. Remove lobsters from the pot and discard the water. Allow the lobsters to cool, then remove the meat from the shell, placing the shells back in the pot. Cut meat into bite-sized pieces and set aside in the refrigerator. Cover the lobster shells with water and bring to a boil. Simmer for twenty minutes then strain the liquid, discarding the shells. Return the stock to the heat and simmer for 2 hours until reduced to about 1 cup of stock.

To make the pot pie mixture and puff pastry shells:

Melt the butter over medium heat in a heavy saucepan. Add the shallots and cook until softened, about one minute. Add the brandy and cook until almost evaporated. Sprinkle in the flour, stir, and cook for two minutes. Add the cup of lobster stock and the milk, and whisk until smooth. Continue to cook until thickened. In the meantime, prepare the puff pastry shells according to the package directions. While the puff pastry shells are cooking, add the heavy cream, salt, thyme, tarragon, nutmeg, and cayenne pepper to the pot pie mixture and cook for 15 minutes until sauce is thick enough to coat the back of a wooden spoon. Remove from heat and add the lobster meat, chopped green onions, salt, and pepper to taste. Ladle the pot pie mixture into the cooked puff pastry shells and serve.

A full-page photograph of a man and a young girl splashing in water. The man is in the background, wearing a bright green shirt, with his arms raised. The girl is in the foreground, wearing a colorful swimsuit, also with her arms raised and a joyful expression. Water is splashing all around them. In the background, a red vertical structure and blue and white horizontal stripes are visible.

HISTORY

Are We Having Fun Yet?

Connecticut's Amusement Parks:
New England treasures that celebrate
the wonder years in all of us >>

By ANNA ZUCKERMAN-VDOVENKO

W

hat is it about amusement parks that keep us coming back year after year? Well, it is likely that feeling of escapism and sheer fun that

these parks provide to the entire family and visitors out to enjoy some recreation. We become immersed in the thrill of it all, from the kiddie parks and roller coasters to the splash-filled water rides. Truth to be told, New Englanders simply can't get enough. Amusement parks are one thing that appeals to children as well as teens quite equally. Such fun activities enhance the feeling of joy only possible during those childhood "wonder years" but also give great pleasure to adults that relive the fun nostalgia of their youth when visiting parks reminiscent of days gone by.

AMUSING AMUSEMENTS

Connecticut is so fortunate to have two large traditional amusement parks that have bridged from the past glory days of formal visits with peaceful picnics, dance halls with live bands, and penny arcades, to state of the art waterslides, heart stopping rides, wooden roller coasters, and great concessions at every turn. Yet these modernized venues still maintain a

wistful cheer only found at amusement parks of this kind. Whether young or old, we feel such a bittersweet longing for the past while enjoying the sheer happiness provided by the modern rides. Every weekend of the season, those rides still cause the same screams and squeals of fright and delight.

Amusement Park aficionados in Connecticut can look forward to the opening of Lake Compounce every spring. It is the oldest amusement park in the country, still going strong as ever in Bristol for the last 175 years. In 2021, the park underwent a massive transformation to make it even more appealing. They spruced it up with new landscaping and fresh color schemes. Palace Entertainment, the current owners, added a re-imagined Main Street just past the turnstiles. The entrance seems magical, especially at night with twinkling lights to delight the child in all of us. A brand new spin on a big water slide re-opened this summer promises to wow the devoted with new impressions during the wild ride.

LAKE COMPOUNCE COMPOUNDS THE FUN

Lake Compounce is truly the Great American Amusement Park if there ever was one, thriving long before Disney was

ever born. Created in 1846, it evolved from the time when scientist, Samuel Botsford, attempted to blow up a lake nestled within a scenic grove. Fortunately, the explosives didn't work. The owner of the property, Gad Norton, realized the potential of the spot when he saw how many people crowded around the gleaming blue water to watch Botsford's experiment. Not long after, Norton installed strolling paths, picnic tables where visitors could relax, and paddleboats for leisurely rides on the lake. Visitors were delighted. The area soon became one of the most popular amusement areas in the region. My, how time flies. Fast-forward nearly two centuries later and we see that Lake Compounce has become a timeless New England tradition featuring over 45 rides and attractions that include a rollicking water park called Crocodile Cove.

Most Connecticut residents have already been to Compounce but repeat their visits because it is just so much darn fun. One feature that keeps calling them back are the four impressive rollercoasters, including "Boulder Dash" (awarded #1 Wooden Roller Coaster in the world five times and counting.) For those who just adore the classics, Compounce boasts a traditional Carousel, Ferris Wheel, and Drop Tower that puts one's heart in one's stomach.



The Lake Compounce historic Carousel, built in 1890, Bristol, Connecticut

Right as Memorial Day ushers in summer, Crocodile Cove opens. This section of the park is where bathing suit-clad guests can relax at shaded cabanas in groups as they enjoy the water park with its many rides n' slides. The "Venus Vortex" is one of the newest slides where riders travel through in their three-person raft before plummeting deep into the hungry mouth of a ravenous Venus Flytrap. All these rides give park goers a chance to beat the heat of the summer while sharing thrills and chills with family and friends. Cabanas are popular, so it is good to reserve those ahead of time.

The new version of "Storm Surge" water slide levels up Lake Compounce's iconic body slide experience by shocking riders' senses with stunning sound and color. Guests will race down the tunnel slide, whizzing past color-changing lights while encountering new sounds and unexpected thrills all the way down. Fitted with iSlide technology, Storm Surge water slide has 30 changing colored lights, four speakers, and a surprise around every twist and turn. The various sights and sounds create an awe-inspiring experience," said Lake Compounce General Manager, Jeffery Davis. "Every season, we look to put fresh twists on fan favorites, and as we continue to celebrate 175 years of family fun, this all-new experience will offer a wild ride guests won't soon forget!" While "Storm Surge" tackles sight and sound, visitors to Crocodile Cove will have tastebuds that tingle thanks to a new restaurant coming to Lake Compounce's water park area. The Lakeside Café will offer popular park favorites like chicken tenders, fries, salads, hamburgers, and veggie burgers next door to the six-story "Venus Vortex."

THE COMPOUNCE LINEUP

Lake Compounce rolls out loaded lineups this year that you may consider:

June – Bites and Pints is a June smash-hit food and drink festival returning for a second season with an all-new, doubly delicious menu.

July – Summer's On! Fireworks flash above the lake every Saturday night, plus an extra evening of celebration on Sunday, July 3. Bring the whole family for longer days and later rides on Boulder Dash, Rev-O-Lution, and more.

September – Ales & Tails – Lake Compounce goes to the dogs this September. Four-legged friends can join their humans as they enjoy the first days of fall and sip on a cold one during this brand-new special Ales & Tails event.

October – Halloween kicks off at Lake Compounce on September 30 and runs weekends through October 30. Stay tuned for more spooky and silly fall fun – more to come!

November – Holiday Lights returns to Lake Compounce with more than one million lights and extended days of operation from November 18 – December 31.

QUINTESSENTIAL QUASSY

Still another classic fun spot we treasure here is Quassy Amusement Park, still going strong after 114 years of operating in Middlebury. Quassy stands alone as a special place with a feeling of history because it has been a family-run business for the last 60 years, now run by the Frantz family. Initially, the park when founded was based around the wooded groves surrounding sparkling Lake Quassapaug, a Native American term name that means "big pond".

The new state-of-the-art water coaster, "Rocket Rapids," is newly launched, promising to be Quassy's "jewel in the crown." The park calls it a unique water slide with a roller coaster feel involving going up steeper portions with water jets adding to thrills for young and old. Quassy is a great family fun place especially because there is no admission fee for the Amusement Park area. This means grandparents and family members that don't want to take on the wide variety of rides can come to watch and enjoy, purchase food at the concessions and vicariously watch others taking the thrill rides. There are wristbands for admission to the riders at the water park portion and amusement park section or a band reasonably priced to access both.

HISTORICAL CONNECTIONS

Trolley services often owned amusement parks in Connecticut as well as in other states. This was because trolley companies built amusement parks that they owned and used their trolleys to take people during the weekend to these venues in order to increase financial solvency. Quassy is very special

because it is the only remaining original Trolley Park in our state that has survived all the pandemics, the Great Depression, and corporate buy-outs of theme parks. Trolley companies stopped their electric rail operations to amusement parks eventually in the 1930s after people realized that once roads had improved, buses could get them to the parks faster.

Lake Quassapaug Amusement Park, as it was first called, was at the end of the trolley line from nearby Waterbury. The electrified rail line once wove in and out of the wooded hills in this peaceful borough of northwestern Connecticut, but now, of course, this form of transport has been gone for more than 90 years. Even though 1930 spelled the end of the line for the Connecticut Trolley Company, its most popular summer stop that once filled the rail cars to full capacity still thrives. Quassy is the only remaining amusement park in Connecticut that was one of the original Trolley Parks owned and operated by the Trolley service at the time. The weekend trolley rides and park fees generated a lot of capital for these companies when folks weren't riding in and out to work. Locals





came to picnic at the park on weekends and eventually started calling the park simply “Quassy.” In the early 1900s, the park hosted an open-air dance hall for live bands to play seven nights a week during the summer months. The old dance hall from 1915 is well-preserved and now hosts a redemption arcade. Picnic tables and later on a Grand Carousel were other featured attractions at that time.

In 1937, a change of ownership took place when the park’s concessionaires purchased the property. The current owner, George Frantzis II, was the grandson of one of those concessionaires and has captained the ship into the new century with foresight. Right around the time of that purchase, the classic Morris Carousel almost went up in flames due to some stalled negotiations. “So the story goes, there was a dispute over the carousel being part of the purchase, and the previous owner had the animals stacked up and ready to torch them when a deal was finally struck,” George Frantzis II said of the negotiations involving his late grandfather. A new and updated classic carousel was created for the park

by auctioning off the old structure piece by piece bringing national attention to the Park in the late 1980s. Menagerie figures fetched more than \$40,000 each, and when the gavel struck for the final time, the carousel auction had raised more than \$630,000. These proceeds led to a new 50-foot grand carousel for the coming year. The new ride was installed in March of 1999. The inner three rows of resin-molded horses are replicas from the famous Allan Herschell line.

Initially, Quassy was limited to being a pure amusement park with rides. The popular water park built later on became an even bigger draw. Splash Away Bay features 15 waterslides, a splash pad for children as well as an interactive water play area called “Saturation Station” for all ages.

IMPROVING UPON PERFECTION

“Our beach used to be packed, and it got to the point where fewer and fewer people were coming to the lake to swim,” John Frantzis noted of how things were two

decades ago. With younger members of the family stepping into key management positions, the owners decided in 2003 that it was time to take a plunge by building a new water attraction. That spring Quassy introduced “Saturation Station,” the first interactive family water play area of its type in the world. With cascading fountains, water cannons, waterslides, and a huge tipping bucket as a centerpiece, the multi-tiered attraction was an overnight success. “I believe it saved the park,” John Frantzis said. He attributes the project’s inception and success to his son-in-law, Eric Anderson, who also heads up the park’s operations. Building off the success of “Saturation Station,” Quassy added two gigantic “Tunnel Twister” waterslides to the attraction in 2006. In 2013, the waterpark virtually doubled in size with the addition of three new slides, plus a children’s splash pad. The attraction was also renamed “Splash Away Bay.” Now, as the temperatures soar in July and August, so does the attendance at Quassy’s re-born lakefront attractions, proving that the

largest investment in the park’s history has paid dividends. The park also rebranded itself as Quassy Amusement & Waterpark.

The Amusement portion of the park has been updated through the years, having many attractions appealing to all ages from little tikes to young adults and beyond. With the advent of large theme parks over the past few decades – numerous ones within driving distance from western Connecticut – Quassy has managed to maintain its identity as the alternative to the mega-facilities. Rarely are there long lines for any of the rides, nor a crush of humanity streaming down the walkways at this quaint lakeside venue. Parents and grandparents love to be spectators while the children ride classics like the “Tilt-A-Whirl” and “Paratrooper.” Yet Quassy, while preserving its treasured past, has kept up with the times by mixing the old with the new. A portion of the lower parking lot near the lake has been transformed into a new development for the venue in recent years with the addition of larger rides like the “Music Fest,” and “Yo-Yo,”



along with “Bumper Cars.” The highly anticipated new “Rocket Rapids” “water coaster” marks the single largest investment in Quassy’s 114-year history and is the sixth major expansion in the water park since it was introduced in 2003. “We’re excited about the June unveiling of this new attraction which incorporates some of the latest technology in waterslides,” says Quassy President Eric Anderson. “Water jets will actually push the two-person rafts uphill and riders will experience some exhilarating drops and high-banked turns.” The attraction is more than 600 feet in length and has a capacity of 340 persons per hour. The installation increases the number of waterslides to sixteen in Splash Away Bay.

QUASSY SWEETHEARTS

Quassy prides itself upon one other unusual trait. You often see loving couples of all ages strolling about the park with a glow in their eyes. This is because so many young people have initially met at the park in their youth while working there for the summer. That ambiance seems to be a secret love potion that lasts a lifetime. There is something magical about Quassy. It is modern of course but also a pleasingly old-fashioned, family-owned business that shows personal care for its employees. Generations of college kids working there for the summer have had a chance to experience the old days of summertime innocence, “those lazy, hazy crazy days of summer” as Nat King Cole once intoned in his famous song.

OCEAN BEACH PARK

New London boasts an amusement park perched on a lovely half mile of wide “sugar sand” beach that gives you a chance to enjoy your day in the sunshine alongside the boardwalk. Opposite the beach, nearby the boardwalk, the park has amusement park essentials from a kiddy sprayground to a triple waterslide. The kiddy rides are old-fashioned with the classic Carousel, a little Train Ride, bumble-bee painted Flyers, kid-sized Spinners, and tiny cars for a that first “driving” experience. A nostalgic-styled arcade with games like Skee-Ball looks like something your grandparents knew and loved from their childhood. A wide




variety of prizes are available with ticket redemption from winning at games. Nature trails, mini and Olympic-sized pools are extra credit beyond the typical amusement park checklist. For a great afternoon, check out their Sandbar Café located on the “upper deck”, overlooking the Boardwalk and Ocean. During the summer season, enjoy your favorite adult or non-alcoholic beverage and a savory snack prepared by the chef. The view is spectacular, plus, there’s always a showcase of oceanic scenes including passing ferries or even the possibility of seeing a submarine. At night there is no better place to enjoy all nightly entertainment, including great bands and fireworks.

SUBURBAN PARK - UNIONVILLE

Lastly, if you want to take a blast into the past, there is a place you can go to time travel and get a brief glimpse of a very old amusement park site that is now returned back to nature for the most part. There are few remnants from the days when the Hartford Trolley took people to Unionville, a portion of Farmington where Suburban Amusement Park once thrived. The Amusement Park operated from 1895 to 1905 and was home to a carousel, the first electrified water fountain, an ice cream parlor, café, and dance hall. The beautiful electrified fountain drew visitors by the hundreds and often it held fish that were

taken from the Suburban Park Pond each spring and returned back to the natural waters in the fall. Colored lights hung from discs that reflected into the water. Electricity was generated from the Park Canals and the Farmington River.

Now, you can freely walk through the aging original Suburban Park gates and take a peek at what remains while enjoying the forest that closely surrounds the site. It may be a little eerie, but how often can one take a hike into the past and imagine how things once were over 100 years ago? If you go, you are bound to run into locals that have great memories of playing in the woods nearby since childhood. Dog owners sometimes bring their fur-babies there, as we saw quite a few off leashes but all very friendly. The Unionville Historical Society has some information about Suburban Park and many photos exhibiting how things once were there in the truly olden days.

Oh, and by the way...Are we having fun yet? If not, drive over to any of these venues and take a ride into the fun zone. Whether it’s Compounce, Quassy, Ocean Beach Park, or Suburban Park, rest assured our state has plenty of recreation and fun to keep you and your family amused all summer. The best moments we’ll always take with us wherever we go are when fun is shared with loved ones. So, bring on the Wonder Years for the child in all of us from 9 months to 99! 



A PASSION FOR FOOD AND ANIMALS

BOBBY FLAY BRINGS TOP-QUALITY NUTRITION TO PETS, WITH THE HELP OF HIS CAT, NACHO

Written by **RENEE DININO**

To quote chef Bobby Flay, “Food is the center of my universe,” however, it’s safe to bet that his human daughter, Sophie, and cat kids, Nacho and Stella, are included in that space!

From The James Beard Foundation to the Culinary Hall of Fame, to being an Emmy award-winning chef and personality, to being recognized as a renowned restaurateur—and the first chef to receive a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame—you might say that Bobby is very well known in the culinary world. However, in 2019, Flay expanded his world and his creativity by developing a line of at-home food...for cats. Called Made by Nacho, the venture was inspired by his two Maine Coon cats, Nacho and Stella.

“While many know I am passionate about cooking, I am equally as passionate about the cats in my life,” notes Flay.

MADE BY NACHO

Flay recognized that there was a distinct need for high-quality cat food in a market where most upscale pet foods are designed for dogs. He noted that while a lot of attention and investment had gone into developing premium, nutritionally sound dog foods, there was an opportunity in the market to

do the same thing for cats. After all, pet parents have been investing in the health and well-being of their feline family members. Flay and his team began development, turning to Nacho’s trusted vet, Dr. Katja Lang, who helped create the formula. The line went into production, and Made by Nacho launched to consumers in April 2021.

The line was inspired by Bobby’s love of Nacho and the desire to create food that would be appealing to a cat and provide healthy feline nutrition. So, how did they combine Bobby’s passion for food for humans into a passion for developing a new cat food line with Nacho? Bobby knew he had to create something he could be just as proud serving his cat kids as the food he creates and serves to humans.

Flay adds that while he may influence the recipes and create what he thinks will appeal to a cat, it’s Nacho who gives the final sign off on the menu and the ingredients, though Flay’s influence is felt in the recipes that push the boundaries of what would be “traditional” cat food.

Assisting in the research, formulation and product development for the brand is Bobby’s human friend, Elly Truesdell.

Truesdell explains, “Made by Nacho is made by a cat, just for cats. Cats are unique, so they require very specific nutrition from their food and have distinct flavor preferences. That’s why we focus 100 percent on cats and cats alone.” Of

course, romance aside, the cat is not doing the actual cooking, so the human assistants use thoughtfully sourced ingredients to deliver exceptional quality, and appeal to the famously fickle tastebuds of cats.

The result is a premium cat food with a premium price tag. Servings of Made by Nacho food can cost two-to-three times that of traditional store brands. However, as more and more pet parents make

investing in the feline family member's health a priority, the expense can be well worth it. Moreover, these foods are as exclusive as Flay's human dishes. Recipes featuring duck liver, wild salmon, ahi tuna, and more would sound appetizing to many foodie humans, but here they've interpreted for a cat's dietary needs. For many cat parents, the health benefits—and a happy cat—are well worth the extra investment.

GOOD FOR CATS. GOOD FOR ANIMALS IN NEED

The Made by Nacho brand is also committed to social responsibility and supporting animals in need. Flay is keenly aware of the challenge of pets that are strays, homeless or, worse, abandoned and has implemented programs to help these animals. Under Flay's direction, the brand provides assistance to shelters, adoption initiatives, cat health research,



Bobby Flay and his cat Nacho, the inspiration for a line of high-end cat foods designed for famously fickle feline tastebuds.

and more. Last year, the brand commemorated two special occasions in October 2021, World Animal Day and Nacho's seventh birthday, with the donation of more than 180,000 meals for kittens and cats in need.

WHERE TO BUY

Made By Nacho is available in wet and dry food formulations, as well as a selection of treats. The line is sold on madebynacho.com, with a subscription option available. The site also includes a blog that includes important information for cat parents on such topics as hydration, keeping cats happy, and preventing anxiety. Cat parents can also find Made by Nacho products at retail at PetSmart and petsmart.com

...AND A STAR IS BORN

In addition to becoming a food wizard like his famous father, Nacho is also a social media star. You can follow his adventures and see amazing moments from his #catpack on Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok @MadebyNacho. 🐾

'To hear the complete interviews with Bobby Flay and Elly Truesdell, you can find them on Renee's iHeartRadio blog via her social media platforms, where you can also find more pet adventures and stories. Follow her on Facebook and Instagram @reneedinino.

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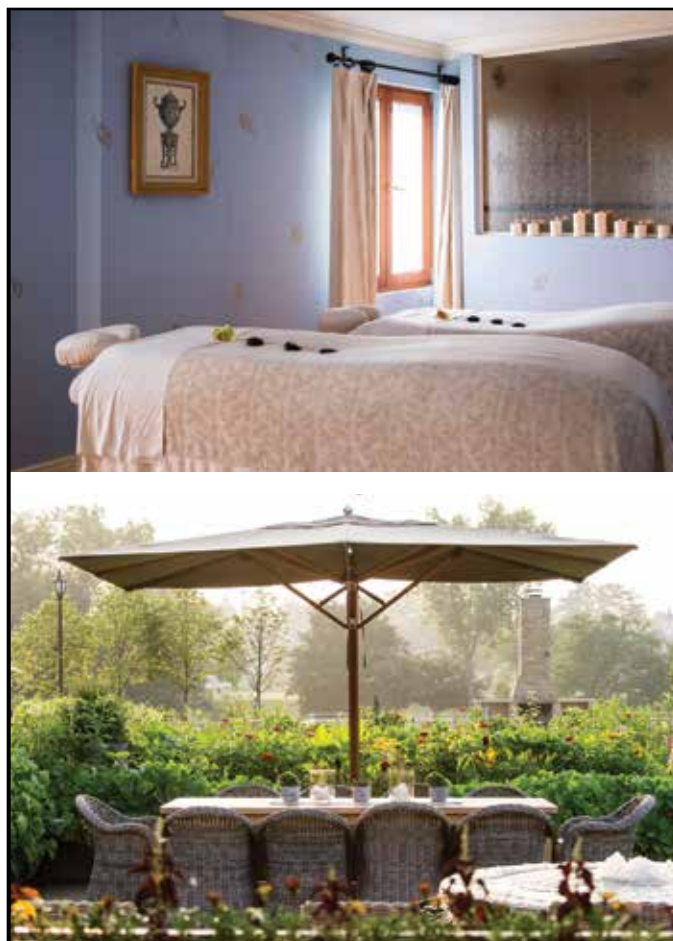
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The Bathing Suit

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

When I was about 12 years old, I attended an end-of-school-year pool party at a classmate's home. I was thrilled to be invited. The classmate was a girl, which meant she didn't find me repulsive – which was not always guaranteed at the time. Her family owned an in-ground swimming pool and diving board, which, in addition to cupcakes and lemonade, made for a promising afternoon.

Shortly after arriving, I mounted the diving board for my first plunge into the pool. The Spotlight Effect – the mistaken belief that people are paying more attention to you than they really are – was in full effect that day. As I prepared to dive, I was quite certain that the eye of every classmate was upon me.

According to the Spotlight Effect, it was probable that no one was paying any attention to me, and rightfully so.

I took three long, purposeful strides,

landing both feet perfectly on the edge of the board, then I bounced, launching myself high into the air. At the apex of my ascent, I jackknifed, pointing my head and arms to the water, and executed the perfect dive.

Everything went swimmingly – see what I did there? – until I hit the water and realized that I had failed to secure the waistband of my already too large swimming trunks by forgetting to tie the drawstring into a bow.

As a result, my body surged into the water, but I left my bathing suit behind. Rather than a bathing suit, I found myself under water at a classmate's pool party in my birthday suit.

My first reaction was to panic, but my next was an immediate, purposeful, necessary rejection of the Spotlight Effect. “No one is watching,” I thought. “Just find your bathing suit and slide it on while remaining underwater. No one will notice.”

I looked up and spotted it:

A floating, blue and white pair of swim trunks near the surface of the water. I kicked up, grabbed the trunks, but by now, I was nearly out of air, in desperate need of a breath. I pulled the swim trunks down to conceal myself as best as I could and came to the surface for a quick breath. As my head broke the surface, I saw them. My classmates. Many of them.

Most of them. Staring at me, naked in the pool. Laughing.

The Spotlight Effect apparently did not apply that day. Or perhaps it was simply the pair of swim trunks floating near the surface of the water, absent of any owner, that had attracted their attention.

Happily, I managed to overcome that humiliating moment in my life. It took about a quarter of a century, but eventually, the embarrassment wore off, but it left me with a deep and profound amusement in the way that human beings dress for the water.

For the entire school year, my classmates had seen me walking the halls of the school in a shirt, pants, belt, socks, and shoes. As the weather warmed, I'd shifted from pants to shorts, but still, most of my body was covered by at least one layer, and my nether regions were always covered by at least two.

Then one day, because a swimming pool was involved, I was reduced to a single item of clothing, just large enough to cover my unmentionables, that required a drawstring to keep affixed to my body.

I was essentially in my boxer shorts in front of my classmates.

My underwear.

It was an accident waiting to happen.

The whole situation involving attire is bizarre when it comes to swimming. We spend our days, covering most of our bodies from neck to toes from the rest of the world, concealing all but the occasional leg (if we're wearing shorts or skirts or kilts or dresses) and shoulder. We typically cover up most private parts with two layers, and sometimes more. We are buttoned up and safe from any possible accidents.

A few years ago, I was standing in front of my class, teaching, when I removed the sweatshirt that I was wearing. A second later, a student in the front row said, "Mr. Dicks, I can see your underwear." I thought the student was referring to the waistband of my underwear, poking up from the waistband of my pants, but no.

There was an enormous hole in the front of my pants.

We owned a cat at the time named Owen who ate wool like I eat cheeseburgers. He had been sitting in my lap earlier that morning before school, apparently eating his way through my pants without me noticing. Before leaving the house, I had tossed on a sweatshirt that extended below the hole, so until I removed it, the hole was concealed.

My point:

Even when an animal chews off the front of your pants, you don't end up naked in real life because of the layers of clothing typically worn.

But on the beach or the pool?

One loose drawstring, one poorly tied knot on a bikini strap, or one especially large wave, and suddenly you're naked in front of friends and family.

When it comes time to swim in a pool or lake or ocean, we essentially strip down to our underwear and spend time with friends, family, colleagues, clients, and strangers. We swim alongside them. Eat cheeseburgers together while nearly naked. Play volleyball or frisbee, diving through the air in undergarments in an attempt to keep a ball aloft or snatch a disc from midflight.

This is not an exaggeration. I have worked, for example, with female colleagues in professional situations for the entire year, only to find myself on the beach with that same person three weeks later in a bikini, which amounts to little more than a colorful bra and panties.

One day, we're seated around a conference table in business attire, discussing serious matters, but the next, because we might (or might not) be entering the water, we've arrived at a public location in our underwear, yet it's completely normal.

Don't get me wrong. It's not like it doesn't make at least some sense. No one wants to swim in jeans and a pullover. Cashmere and saltwater don't exactly mix. Shakespeare's Ophelia dies by suicide after leaping into a river in a dress.

We shouldn't swim in the same clothing that we wear to the office or the laundromat or the pool hall, but still, it's weird.

The differences between male and female swimsuits seem odd, too. Today, I wear a bathing suit that stretches halfway to my knees, and it's designed so that even if the drawstring comes untied, it's not going anywhere. But it's also loose fitting, like shorts. In fact, I could wear my bathing suit as shorts and no one would really notice.

And yes, some men wear Speedos, often as a part of swim training and competitions, but some wear Speedos recreationally, too. But those gents are few and far between.

I also suspect that those recreational wearers of Speedos are also donning them for competitive purposes, too.

Just a different kind of competition.

I've also started wearing a swim shirt – a loose-fitting, moisture-wicking tee shirt designed to feel soft against the skin, allow for unimpeded swimming, and best of all, protect against the sun.

When I'm wearing my bathing suit and

swim shirt, I look like I'm wearing shorts and a tee shirt. The fabric is different, of course, but to the outside observer, I essentially swim in the same clothing that I wear all summer.

But women? While some wear trunks and tee-shirt-styled swim shirts, the majority of female swim suits are form fitting and cover far less of the body than a man's bathing suit. Even as a one-piece, the female swimsuit leaves little to the imagination.

Why do men swim in the same kind of clothing they might wear to a park or parade, but women wear swimsuits that hug their bodies and expose far more skin to the world (and the sun)? According to sunscreen manufacturers, male swimsuits (just the trunks cover 10-20% of a man's body), while bikinis cover just 3- 9%.

That's before I even don my swim shirt.

It all makes for a bizarre yet socially accepted form of socialization while in our underwear.

I think I know why.

When I was a teenager, my friends and I went to Moonstone Beach in South Kingston, Rhode Island. At the time, Moonstone was a nude beach, so my friends and I were looking forward to our first encounter with public nudity. I was admittedly worried that I might not find the courage to remove all of my clothing once we arrived, but that concern evaporated quickly.

One look at the people walking the beach made it clear that even though our bathing suits amount to little more than publicly acceptable underwear, that underwear can make a big difference in terms of concealing parts that are best kept concealed. To my 16-year-old eyes, the minuscule coverage that bathing suits afford was more important than I had ever imagined.

No wonder my classmates were laughing at me that day. ■

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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