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Seasons' Greetings



James Tully

Friends and Neighbors,

This spring, Seasons Media proudly marks its nineteenth year of innovation and storytelling. From its humble beginnings—spawned from a serendipitous reunion of two friends on a baseball field, reminiscing about their days playing junior football whilst watching their 6-year-old sons practice—the vision has always been clear. We set out to craft compelling narratives while providing a high-quality experience for both our readers and advertisers. Our guiding principle echoes the timeless adage from “Field of Dreams”: “If you build it, they will come.” This belief in the paramount importance of quality has been our north star.

Since our inception in 2006, the media landscape has undergone transformative changes, and like all forward-looking businesses, we’ve evolved and adapted in stride. Our stature as a comparatively “small” company has bestowed upon us a unique blend of agility and resilience. These attributes enable us to nimbly navigate the industry’s fluctuations, innovate and take calculated risks. Our portfolio’s expansion, including the launch of our latest podcast, “Room 4 Four,” exemplifies our commitment to differentiation and growth. Venturing into new territories and refining our platforms and technologies underscore our dedication—not just to being distinct, but to enhancing the audience experience, particularly here in our home state of Connecticut.

On behalf of everyone at Seasons Media, we are so grateful to our audience who can experience all our content in platforms that we could never have imagined in 2006, from our award-winning Seasons magazines, CT VOICE, television shows, podcasts and digital assets. And a huge thank you to our advertising partners. They are the ones that make everything at Seasons Media happen. They understand what makes Seasons Media different and dynamic. I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to the entire team at Seasons Media. Your dedication, creativity and hard work are the linchpins of our success. Your belief in our vision, commitment to quality and collaborative spirit have been indispensable. Together, we’ve cultivated a culture of mutual growth and innovation, always asking, “What can we achieve together?”

As we look toward the future, let’s continue to embrace the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, building on our legacy of quality, innovation and community. Here’s to many more years of storytelling, growth and success.

With appreciation and anticipation,

Jim

Jim Tully
Publisher
Seasons Magazines



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stories about the interesting
people and places in our
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Spring 2024

SEASONS Magazines®

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“THE FIRST BLOOMS
OF SPRING ALWAYS
MAKE MY HEART
SING.”

-S. Brown




SEASONS®
MEDIA

UConn Health Expands Thoracic Surgery Program With Dustin Walters, M.D.

Written by **STEVEN BLACKBURN** / Photography by **TINA ENCARNACION, UCONN HEALTH**

Dustin Walters, M.D., has been quickly expanding the thoracic surgical care program at UConn Health despite only having recently arrived from Tufts Medical Center in Boston. Although not an uncommon specialty, thoracic care isn't usually provided as comprehensively outside major cities. However, with Dr. Walters' arrival, this advanced level of care is now offered at UConn John Dempsey Hospital in Farmington.

"It's one of the more technically challenging surgical specialties," said Dr. Walters, who originally served as Tufts' interim chief of thoracic surgery. "The types of procedures we are now doing at UConn Health are more consistently seen in large tertiary care centers."

PROVIDING DIFFICULT-TO-PERFORM, MINIMALLY INVASIVE SURGERY

Part of what makes this particular specialty so challenging is based on the complex tools that are required to perform certain life-saving procedures in a minimally invasive way. This is especially the case for treating lung cancer, which is one of the most common forms of cancer and the leading cause of cancer death, afflicting a quarter of a million Americans each year. For these procedures, Dr. Walters performs minimally invasive surgery with the Da Vinci robot.

"I have gravitated towards this platform since it provides superior visualization and more precise movement, allowing me to perform the same operation through smaller incisions that are often less than a centimeter in size," he said. "This translates to less pain, decreased blood loss, shorter stays in the hospital and a quicker return to normal life without compromising the cancer operation."

In fact, Dr. Walters strives to use the Da Vinci platform for every one of his treatments, even for esophageal cancer, which is less commonly performed because it's one of the more challenging operations to do minimally invasively. "It's hard to say that the robotic approach for

esophagectomy is the gold standard, but patients definitely recover more quickly afterward compared to traditional approaches," said Dr. Walters.

Being able to perform robotic surgery is such an important skill for doctors to master that it will be one of the offerings at a new fellowship program that Dr. Walters is launching at UConn Health. Dr. Walters will serve as the fellowship's program director to train the next generation of cardiothoracic surgeons at UConn Health.

A FULL SPECTRUM OF THORACIC CARE

With Dr. Walters, UConn Health now offers the full spectrum of thoracic care, from simple diagnostics to highly complex cancer operations. But it's a team effort that wouldn't be possible without the help of UConn Health's other highly specialized experts. Dr. Walters can't say enough good things about the team, including surgical oncologist Dr. Kevin Staveley-O'Carroll, who is chair of the Department of Surgery, with a strong interest in esophageal cancer, and Dr. Omar Ibrahim, director of interventional pulmonology.

"Dr. Staveley-O'Carroll has a lot of experience in advanced esophageal and pancreatic cancer," said Dr. Walters. "Combining our ability to perform minimally invasive robotic surgery with experience in complicated esophageal reconstructions allows us to treat some of the most complicated cancers."

"Dr. Walters is an outstanding person and a tremendous surgeon," said Dr. Staveley-O'Carroll. "He will be providing destination services in minimally invasive lung and esophageal cancer. His collaboration with Dr. Ibrahim in interventional pulmonology takes our busy lung cancer program to the next level. And his minimally invasive skills are ideally suited to combine with my background in major resections of the stomach and esophagus and complex reconstructions with colon interpositions."

With Dr. Ibrahim, Dr. Walters has a multidisciplinary clinic where they streamline patient care by collaborating on almost every patient who has lung cancer to ensure

Dustin Walters, M.D.

they can get what they need in as few visits as possible. “We will always do what is necessary in making it easier for the patient since nobody likes having to come in for multiple visits when they can be completed in a single day,” said Dr. Walters. “It’s somewhat rare to have a truly integrated clinic with multidisciplinary care, even at academic centers.”

“Dr. Walters has quickly integrated into our team and is already making strides in improving care delivery, incorporating cutting-edge technology, and advancing surgical techniques for our community,” added Dr. Ibrahim.

MINIMIZING NARCOTICS USE, EXPEDITING MOBILIZATION AND RETURNING TO NORMAL ACTIVITIES

Although his tenure only recently began, Dr. Walters has already implemented a new team approach involving the

patients and their families to help expedite and improve recovery, which naturally required building consensus among staff and fostering a new culture to ensure nurses, physical therapists and other team members were on board. He and his former colleagues at the University of Virginia developed the pathway, which Dr. Walters successfully implemented at Tufts during his tenure there. Implementation also involved coordinating efforts, including medication distribution and process digitization.

Called Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS), the pathway strives to ensure patients and their families understand they are an important part of the team. “This allows them to take ownership and agency of their health. The best outcomes occur when patients and their families are truly partners throughout the process,” said Dr. Walters.

ERAS has three main tenets: control pain with minimal



narcotics, promote early mobilization and ensure patients return to normal activities as quickly as possible. The tenet on pain control is based on the understanding that narcotics can slow recovery, on emerging evidence that they might actually worsen cancer outcomes, and on clear data that connects their use to the opioid epidemic.

Dr. Walters and his team minimize narcotics use by utilizing a variety of multi-modal pain control approaches. “We use nerve blocks before and during surgery along with several non-narcotic medications that are designed to be very effective for pain control,” said Dr. Walters. “This doesn’t mean that we don’t ever use narcotics. But we really try to be thoughtful about their use.”

For early mobilization, Dr. Walters ensures patients get out of bed and move the day of surgery to prevent blood clots and to make sure that patients do not lose their conditioning. This naturally leads into ERAS’ third main tenet, which is to ensure patients return to normal activities. “We want patients to return to the things they enjoy or to what gives them pleasure as soon as possible,” said Dr. Walters. “Being



diagnosed with cancer is hard enough for patients. When faced with a prolonged recovery, it leaves people wondering when they can return to normal. We want to speed up that process, because it’s not just about curing their cancer, but giving patients their lives back.”

Combining this ERAS pathway with minimally invasive robotic surgery, Dr. Walters and his team are often able to get patients home the day after a lobectomy, one of the most common lung cancer operations, when the length of stay is generally four to

five days across the U.S.

“Ultimately, we all care about achieving the best outcome for each patient. Everybody was on board with ERAS since we all will do anything to achieve the best possible outcome for our patients,” Dr. Walters concluded. ■

Steven Blackburn is a freelance writer with more than 10 years of journalism experience in various fields, including U.S. education and Connecticut community interest stories. He lives in Winsted.

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Randall Beach Is a (Connecticut) People Person

VETERAN COLUMNIST BRINGS
SOME OF HIS FAVORITE STATE CHARACTERS
TOGETHER IN BOOK

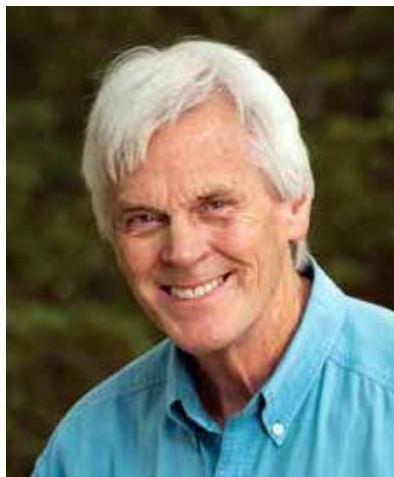
By FRANK RIZZO

Randall Beach is a character witness. For more than 40 years, the veteran journalist has chronicled some of Connecticut's most colorful, passionate and often unsung people in his columns for The New Haven Register and Connecticut magazine.

Beach follows in the tradition of other great city columnists who write about the local sui generis characters who may not make the headlines but nevertheless contribute to the character of a city, a region and a state, including columnists such as San Francisco's Herb Caen, Boston's George Frazier, Chicago's Mike Royko and New York City's Jimmy Breslin.

"Connecticut Characters: Profiles of Rascals and Renegades" (Globe Pequot; 242 pages) is a collection of his favorite pieces about some of the most memorable folks he has written about over the decades, many who are no longer with us but, thanks to Beach, have been given their due and their place in the Connecticut landscape.

In Beach's collection, they include a woman who created a nut museum in Old Lyme, a Good Humor man in Madison, a hot dog vender in New Haven, Babe Ruth's granddaughters in Durham and Wallingford, one of the last elevator operators in the state, and an obsessive Muhammad Ali fan in Bethany.



Randall Beach, columnist and author

**A collection of his
favorite pieces about
some of the most
memorable folks he
has written about
over the decades.**

They also include celebrities who pass through Connecticut or native Nutmeggers who have returned: folks such as Hamden's Donald Hall who was a U.S. poet laureate; gonzo journalist Hunter Thompson who dropped by the University of Hartford; author Kurt Vonnegut speaking at Hartford's

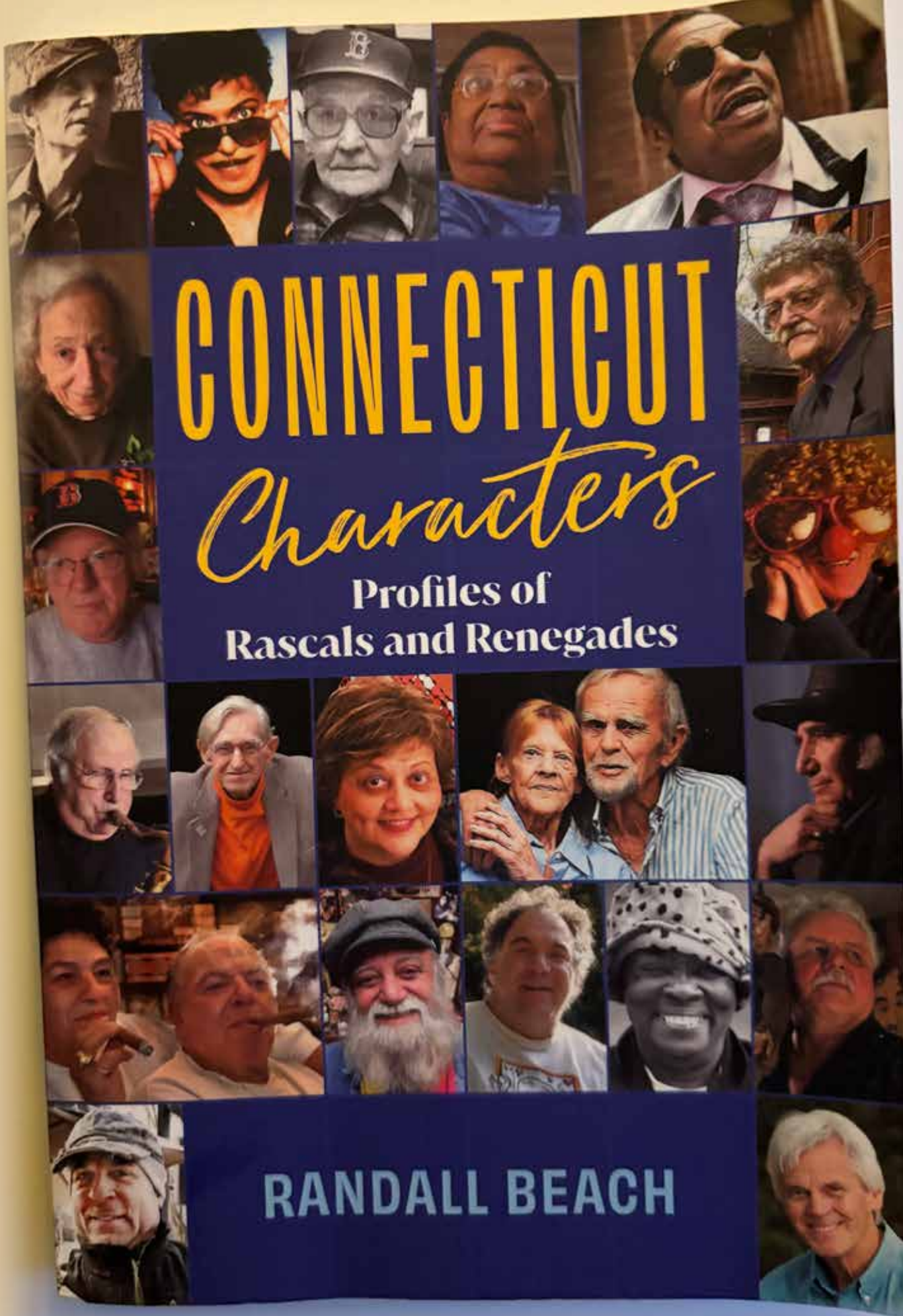
Mark Twain House; Spanky McFarland from "Our Gang" visiting Southern Connecticut State University; Little Richard wowing a crowd at the Faith Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Hartford; Charles Webb in Bethel, who wrote the book in which the film "The Graduate" was based; and Waterbury's Nick Apollo Forte, a Connecticut lounge singer who co-starred in a Woody Allen movie.

Sometimes the columns are simply touching tributes to those who have died: Yale President A. Bartlett Giamatti; Maurice Bailey who ran New Haven's Shubert Theater during its golden years as a try-out house for Broadway shows; Simcha, the dog who was a fixture at the cinemas in New Haven and Madison; and most movingly, Margaret Holloway, a graduate of the Yale School of Drama who recited Shakespeare on the streets of New Haven "for therapy and spare change," and whom Beach called, "our greatest street thespian."

How It Began

When Beach arrived at the New Haven Register in 1977 as a reporter, he soon took notice of the newspaper's resident columnist, Bill Ryan. "That was his whole job, writing about people," said Beach, "and he seemed to be having a lot of fun doing it."

When Ryan retired, Beach approached the newspaper's managing editor who agreed to give the young journalist a chance to do a weekly column in addition to his other reporting duties and for no extra pay.

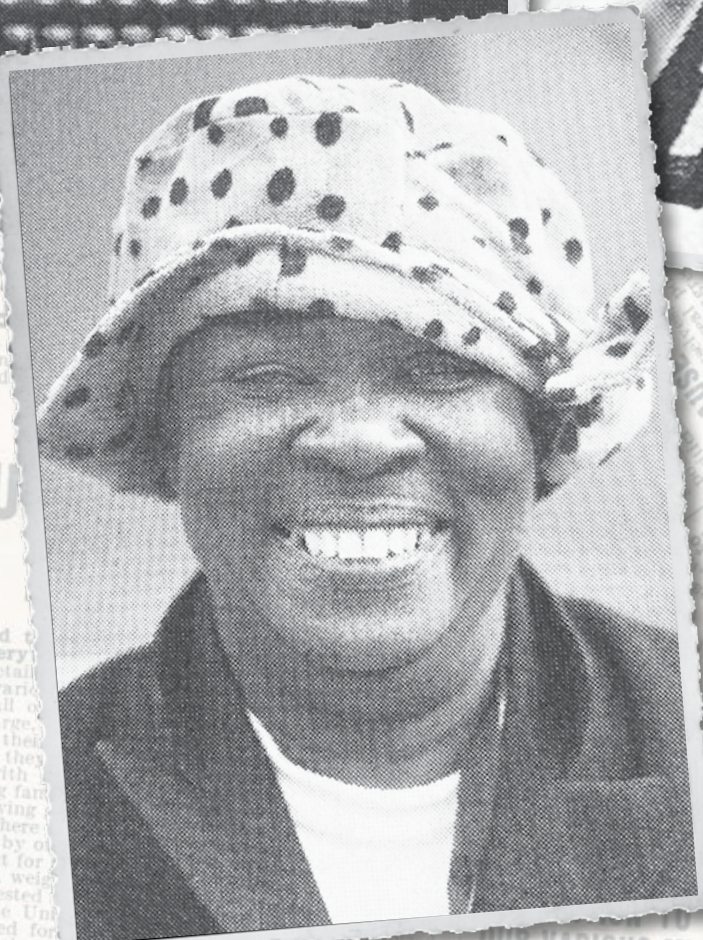


CONNECTICUT

Characters

Profiles of
Rascals and Renegades

RANDALL BEACH



Top left, Manson Whitlock. Photo by New Haven Register's Jeff Holt; Fred Parris. Photo by the New Haven Register; "The Shakespeare Lady," Margaret Holloway. Photo by Tom Kaszuba.

And so began Beach's parallel career as chronicler of Connecticut characters, and places, too. He co-authored "The Legendary Toad's Place: Stories from New Haven's Famed Music Venue." Writing seems to be in the family genes. Internet sensation Natalie Beach, his daughter with wife Jennifer Kaylin, is the author of the recent "Adult Drama and Other Stories."

Though one newspaper colleague referred to Beach's colorful subjects as "freak of the week," the columnist felt otherwise.

"I'm giving these people dignity as I tell their story in a different way," he said. "Their stories deserve to be told."

Beach's sense of empathy comes naturally, added Beach, a gentle man with kind eyes and a soft, inviting voice. "My father worked for Norman Vincent Peale for Guidebooks magazine so this sense of positive thinking has been in my DNA from the beginning."

Beach was raised in Mt. Kisco, N.Y.; it was a good place to grow up, he said. His interests in writing began at an early age, creating a neighborhood newspaper with his brother. "I was noticing interesting characters even then," he noted. He later wrote for his high school newspaper and had a column in the newspaper at Lafayette College where he was an English major, before transferring to Boston University.

After a stint working for the George McGovern presidential campaign in 1972, he got a job at U.P.I., first in Washington, D.C. during the Watergate scandal; that was an exciting time, Beach remembered. After a transfer to the Nashville desk where he felt unfulfilled, he quit and got a news writing job at what is now the Record Journal of Meriden. His job at the

New Haven newspaper soon followed, where he began first covering Branford, then West Haven, then Yale and finally the city at large.

Drawn to Passion

It was his role as columnist that most defined his career. Some of his early column subjects came about from his local reporting, like when Beach was covering courts and he noticed a fellow who he would always see attending trials, as if he was a member of an audience in a theater. As his column became more popular, people would suggest folks in the community or around the state that Beach might find interesting to write about, especially those who might be overlooked.

"They suggested some great people," he said, "because they knew I wouldn't make fun of these people but rather simply shine a light on them in a positive way."

Beach was most drawn to people who had a passion for a particular interest, whether it be the Hamden man who had an extraordinary train collection in his basement, or the car washer by day and an Elvis impersonator by night whom he talked to at a Milford diner. Other examples include the man who cared for the Sicilian puppets in Branford's Stony Creek Puppet House or the gentleman who operated a typewriter repair shop in New Haven.

"They weren't necessarily wild and crazy people," explained Beach. "Many were quite reserved, but you saw a fire within them. That was something I wanted to explore it and bring it out of them."

As an example, Beach fondly remembers Vinny Mazzetta, "a wonderful saxophonist who had this amazing solo on the record 'In the Still of the Night.' He

never talked about it and only his family knew about it and finally late in his life, the family urged him to go public with it, saying to him, 'You've been overlooked all these years.'

"Vinny was the one in 1956 who got the St. Bernadette Church basement in the Morris Cover section of New Haven for The Five Satins. He was never a member of the group; he was simply a good sax player who was more interested in jazz—and who played that fabulous solo. He did it off the cuff, it was recorded, and he walked away. He says he was paid \$42.50."

Mazzetta told Beach he had to pay \$40 for the union recording fee so he actually only made \$2.50. "I felt he deserved the recognition and for the 2010 column, we went back to that church basement when he was 75 and he played the solo for me again. He did so, and it was beautiful."

After all these years of column writing about these folks from all walks of life, with all sorts of passions, does Beach, now a freelancer who writes for substack.com, think of himself as a Connecticut character?

"Well, as I talk to all of these people for the columns, I bring myself into it as a character who talks to them, so I guess, in a way, I am." ■

Frank Rizzo is a freelance journalist who writes for Variety, The New York Times, American Theatre, Connecticut Magazine, and other periodicals and outlets, including ShowRiz.com. He lives in New Haven and New York City. Follow Frank at ShowRiz@Twitter.





Saint Francis Hospital
Trinity Health

Inspired by Service, Connecticut Native Returns to Trinity Health Of New England

By **KIM LUCEY MILLEN** / Photography by **STAN GODLEWSKI**

Angela Yuan, M.D., still remembers the patients she and the team from Saint Francis Hospital served in Bolivia. Working in a hospital with no air conditioning, except for the operating rooms, they helped dozens of women with gynecological conditions, some of them very serious and extremely uncomfortable. That visit in April of 2015 was her first mission trip with the team from Saint Francis, and Dr. Yuan was a fourth-year medical student at the time. The experience helped shape her professionally, guiding her toward a specialty as a urogynecologist, and also personally.

“That act of doing good through service is very much integral to Saint Francis Hospital,” said Dr. Yuan. “And it’s one of the reasons I decided to come back. I wanted to be part of that tight knit feel of community.”

THE PATH BACK HOME

Born in Boston, Dr. Yuan was raised on the Connecticut shoreline in Guilford. She stuck with the Nutmeg state for college and medical school, attending the University of Connecticut (UConn). Her clinical training through UConn School of Medicine served as her first introduction to Saint Francis, part of Trinity Health Of New England, meeting many of the doctors on rotation and learning from their experience and specialties.

After heading north to New Hampshire to complete her obstetrics and gynecology residency at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, she

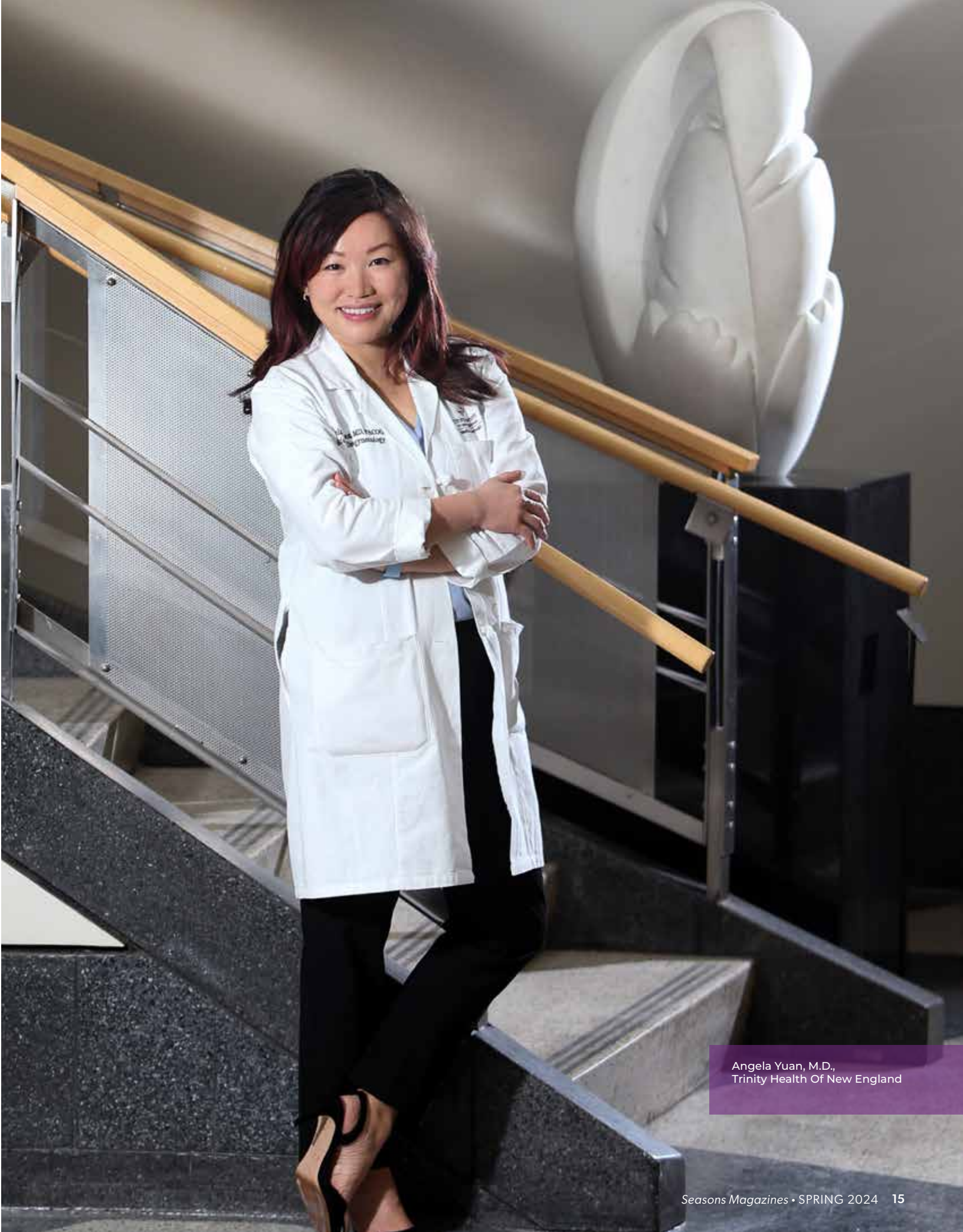
matched at Cleveland Clinic. There, she completed her fellowship in Female Pelvic Medicine and Reconstructive Surgery. During her time in Ohio, the pandemic hit. Dr. Yuan and her husband found themselves making the long drive back to New England often with their two young children to stay safe and see family. So, when a urogynecologist position popped up with the Trinity Health Of New England Medical Group in 2022, she responded immediately, to bring her family home. Her kids are thrilled to be closer to their grandparents.

“I feel like I’m paying it forward to the community where I grew up,” said Dr. Yuan. “And now I’m able to help inspire the next generation to do the same.”

She enjoys mentoring medical school students and residents, helping them start their research projects and becoming competitive applicants for fellowships. In her spare time, Dr. Yuan enjoys biking around her new hometown of West Hartford with her husband and kids. She is an avid reader, completing 27 mystery and thriller books last year. And she picked up knitting during her time in New Hampshire, where she was part of a knitting club. Now her kids get to sport all her homemade sweaters and hats all winter long.

FINDING HER SPECIALTY

Pelvic floor disorders affect about half of the women in the United States. As a urogynecologist, Dr. Yuan works to help to address these issues, which can include the loss of pelvic floor support (prolapse), loss of bladder or bowel control (urinary or fecal



Angela Yuan, M.D.,
Trinity Health Of New England

incontinence), and pelvic floor dysfunction.

“Many women can feel embarrassed to talk about these things,” said Dr. Yuan. “But, in the past 5 to 10 years, we’ve seen women become more empowered to talk to their doctor about what’s going on and fix it. These are common issues that are generally not life-threatening, but at the end of the day, taking a woman’s focus off of finding a bathroom does a huge part in alleviating her daily mental burden.”

Dr. Yuan stressed that this is not a normal part of aging; it’s something going wrong with the support of the patient’s urethra, and something nearly everyone will deal with to some degree in their life. During that memorable mission to Bolivia 9 years ago, Dr. Yuan helped address some of the most extreme examples she had experienced up to that point.

“I learned even the most extreme examples don’t have to be this way,” said Dr. Yuan. “It’s empowering to be able to fix even the most severe cases and give women their normal lives back.”

Dr. Yuan offers non-surgical and surgical treatments, noting that many issues can be addressed with medication or a physical therapist. She has extensive training in minimally invasive surgical techniques, and performs vaginal, laparoscopic and robotic surgeries.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The field of urogynecology has gained a lot of steam in the past decade after becoming formalized into a field in 2012. While many great strides have been taken during that time, Dr. Yuan says there is always more to learn. For example, in many cases of prolapse surgery, she says the uterus would become a “passive victim,” and have to be taken out during the process. But, in the past 5 years, doctors have really started exploring whether or not a hysterectomy is needed for prolapse surgery and taking more effort to preserve the uterus.

Dr. Yuan says an ongoing challenge in her field is the current FDA ban on transvaginal mesh for prolapse care. She says results had been mixed with mesh before the ban, as it had been associated with complications and side effects, but it also provided many women with control of their prolapse with excellent results. Now, she’s hoping to find a new solution to help women in

a long-lasting way and believes that more research is needed to engineer something safer for women to use. She is also taking it upon herself to research the results and safety of prolapse and incontinence surgery to help improve outcomes for future patients. She noted, “the only way to make sure we seek excellence, is to always work toward improving.”

PAGING DR. YUAN

Dr. Yuan is an assistant professor in the Department of OB/GYN of the Frank H. Netter, M.D. School of Medicine at Quinnipiac University. She is also a fellow of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and a member of the American Urogynecologic Society.

Dr. Yuan’s main practice is in Bloomfield at 580 Cottage Grove Road, where she does new patient evaluations, consultations and testing. This office also features on-site pelvic floor physical therapy right next door to Dr. Yuan’s office, making treatment seamless for many of her patients. While the majority of her surgeries are done at Saint Francis, she also serves patients at two other Trinity Health Of New England hospitals: Saint Mary’s Hospital in Waterbury and Mercy Medical Center in Springfield, Mass. In order

Dr. Yuan offers non-surgical and surgical treatments, noting that many issues can be addressed with medication or a physical therapist.

to increase access to these specialty services across the region, she also sees patients in the Trinity Health Of New England Medical Group Urology practice in Middlebury.

To schedule an appointment with Dr. Yuan, or to learn more about all of Trinity Health Of New England’s Women’s Health services, visit trinityhealthofne.org/womens. 📞

Kimberly Millen is a freelance journalist with more than two decades of experience in both print and broadcast media. She lives in New England with her husband and son, exploring all that each of the four seasons has to offer.

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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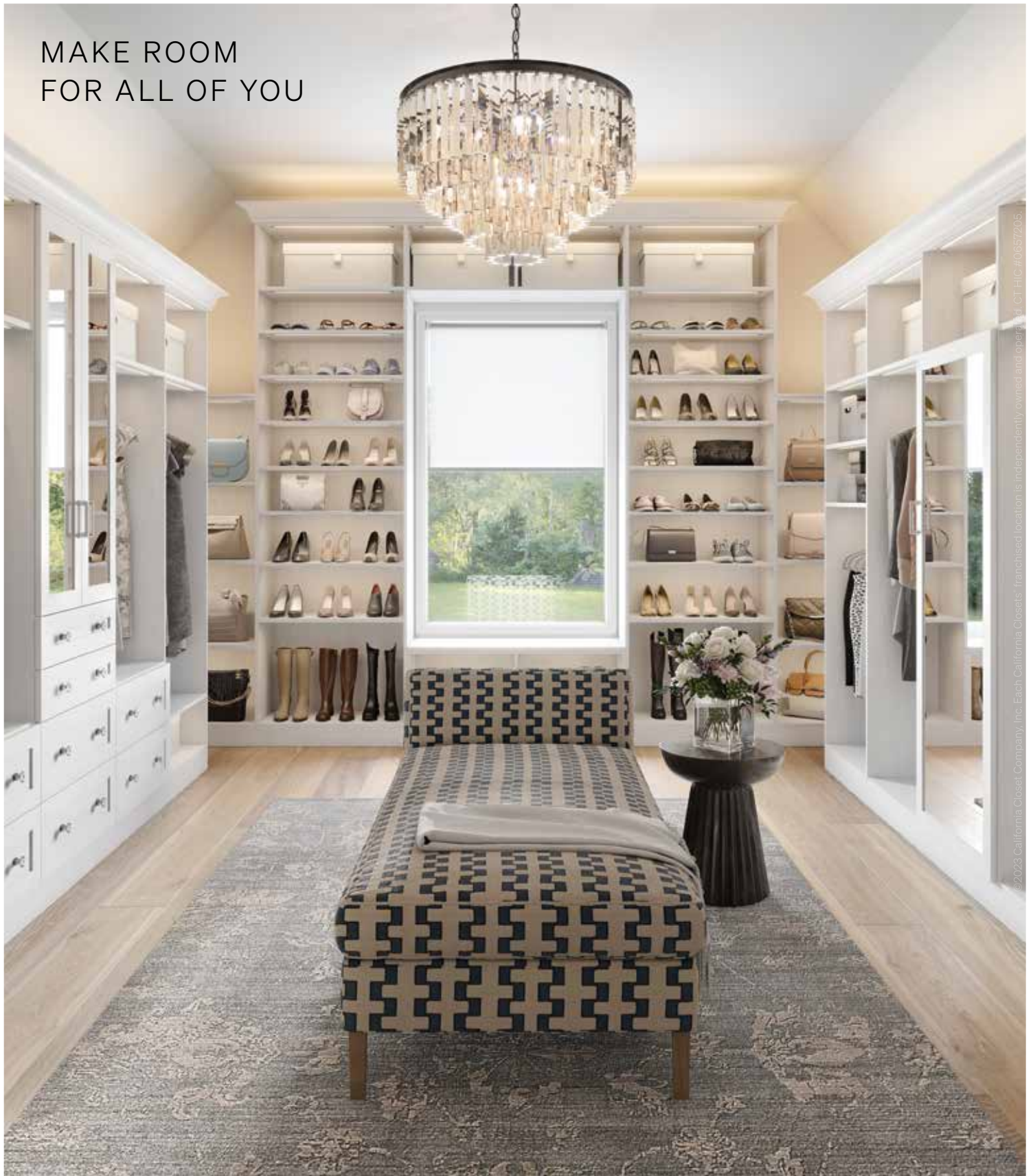
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Beyond the Classroom

By MELISSA NICEFARO



Sights and scenes from UConn's HuskyTHON 2023 during the morale hour and miracle family walkthrough at the Hugh S. Greer Field House on the morning of March 4, 2023. (Sydney Herdle/UConn Photo)



Connecticut's colleges and universities are well known for their academics, constantly ranking among the top institutions of higher education, but it's what happens outside of the classroom that draws students to some of our schools.

"We often say at UConn that our athletics programs represent our university's 'front porch,' or a welcoming entry for people to discover UConn and become interested in its many other attributes," said Stephanie Reitz, University of Connecticut's (UConn) media relations manager.

UConn, known around the world for its men's and women's basketball programs, has become an attractive educational option for many who are applying to colleges. With 21 teams in NCAA Division 1, UConn had 576 student athletes in the last full academic year who won a combined eight Big East championships and the national NCAA championship in men's basketball.

"These student athletes are more than names on the backs of jerseys; every one of them is a student who is receiving a chance to continue beyond high school in the sport they love, and to represent UConn on the national stage," Reitz stated.

UConn is about much more than athletics and has a strong philosophy that learning occurs on both sides of

the classroom door and having a fulfilling college experience includes having a community of friends, mentors and others on campus. The university also has more than 700 student clubs and organizations with a range of academic and social interests that encourage meeting new friends and engaging in new activities.

“And if there isn’t already a club to meet their interests, students can launch their own,” Reitz said.

With 34 residential and non-residential living and learning communities with more than 2,800 participants with a variety of professional aspirations, personal affinities and identities, and other commonalities, UConn’s learning communities are among the top 25 in the nation, ranked by U.S. News.

One of UConn’s most impactful student initiatives is the annual HuskyThon dance marathon, where students dance for 18 hours

to raise money for Connecticut Children’s, raising more than \$1.4 million last year.

Through its Student Union, the university offers a central location for students to congregate outside of class time through a variety popular, safe and often free activities including a movie theater, game room, TV lounges and a food court—along with art, music, lectures and other events at venues throughout its campuses.

With such a large number of commuters, Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) also relies on a central location for students. The school opened two new commuter lounges last year.

“Students have a place to relax with soft lighting, microwave and refrigerator, and supports. It’s a place where they feel warm, fuzzy and comfortable when they have idle time. We want to give our commuter students a sense of identity and connection at the university,” said Tracy Tyree,



UConn's HuskyTHON 2023 at the Hugh S. Greer Field House in the afternoon on March 4, 2023. (Sydney Herdle/UConn Photo)





SCSU's vice president for student affairs.

Tyree provides oversight for the student experience any time students are not in class, including athletics, clubs/organizations, residence halls, counseling center, health center, well-being areas and access programs.

She's insistent on removing the stereotype associated with "commuter schools" that may come across as "unengaging." With 2,000 students living on campus making up one-quarter of undergraduates, SCSU does have a larger commuter population than many other local campuses.

"We've done some important work to engage our commuter students and help them see themselves in the life of the university. Commuter assistants

are available to help them navigate the university and life, kind of through the lens of a commuter student," Tyree said. "When they come onto campus, they feel welcomed, seen and heard."

The university hosts special events just for commuters including a breakfast in the parking garage where most students park, lunches in between classes and more. She runs traditional events to keep all students involved.

"We set the tone every semester how excited we are that the students are here. We have pep rallies and big carnivals a few times a year," Tyree said. "We have Student Appreciation Day in the spring with carnival rides and food trucks to create a festive environment."



Southern also hosts impactful events to keep its students involved with the community. Students celebrated the 32nd annual Friends of Rudolph in December with students engaging with children from the New Haven community, partnering with the New Haven Police and Parks and Recreation.

“Hundreds of children celebrate Christmas with us where our students do crafts, decorate cookies and give out gifts,” Tyree

said. “In the fall we held a trunk or treat for the community that hundreds of our students helped at. So that’s a way our students both have fun themselves and see the role that we play in the community—that’s so important as a regional public university.”

Southern has a robust set of 125 clubs and organizations and club sports. While some clubs are related to classroom learning, there is also a game group that plays board games, anime society, theater organization and musical groups. Tyree said at the root of all clubs and organizations is to see that students engage with their peers around anything.

“In this case, it’s about engaging around friendship, it’s engaging around common interests or ideas—it’s engaging around identity. Things that they personally share in common around who they are and how they identify. All of that will strengthen their connection to the university and make them more likely to persist and earn their degree,” Tyree said.

Albertus Magnus also places a strong concentration on student identity. Since it is a Catholic college in the Dominican tradition, it has a bit of a different faith-based flair from other colleges.

“We look at study as a lifelong



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process and we instill in our students that learning is beyond the classroom. Yes, you're going to learn classroom things here, and yes, you're going to leave here with a degree that you can use to get a job, but we also like to grow the love of knowledge and truth. We want them to be searching for the truth in the world and we want them to know when they leave here that they continue to grow and educate themselves about the world as a person," said Sister Cathy Buchanan.

The college is based on four pillars: study, prayer, community and service. "Everything that we do is based on one of those pillars and we try to look at it from a holistic perspective. We try to make a well-rounded student when they leave here with more than just the education," added Sr. Buchanan.

The school ministers to all faiths, not only Catholic students. If a student is Muslim, Jewish or other Christian denomination, Sr. Buchanan will connect them with a local parish, church, mosque or synagogue. In addition to a chapel at the college, there is a sacred prayer space for Muslim students.

While all four pillars are important, the pillar of service is the driving force of Albertus's culture.

Connected with 17 different service organizations in the New Haven area, students are actively involved with service projects.

"We introduce how important it's for us to be good neighbors. Every freshman has a responsibility to get involved in a service project. Then we also have what we call St. Dominic's Scholars, students who have a scholarship for service with a requirement to do a certain amount of hours of service," she explained.

The college's biggest day on campus—Service Day—comes each April. The school is closed and the whole college community comes together and does service projects in the community, from where many of Albertus students come.

The University of New Haven (UNH) is also very active in community events, offering more than 150 student organizations, thousands of campus events each year and a competitive Division II athletics



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program. But in the end, beyond the classroom, a job awaits.

Since the ultimate goal of higher education is a job, students need hands on experience. Matt Caporale, executive director for the University of New Haven's Career Development Center, prepares students for graduate school, careers or even starting their own business. He builds relationships with employers and brings opportunities to campus for students.

"We help our students discover why they're in school and what it is they really want to do. We focus on personal and career discovery and through connections, drive opportunities back to campus," he explained.

A big part of the college experience is encouraging students to discover who they are as individuals, where their skills and interests and personality traits lie, and then how that matches up with their field and their areas of interest.

All undergraduate students are required to do two "high-impact practices" in order to graduate. That can include an internship, studying abroad or what

the university calls academic service learning, such as a faculty-mentored research project, a capstone course, or an industry-sponsored course or project.

"There are abundant opportunities for students for those two experiences throughout their time as an undergrad—we have avenues for every one of our students," Caporale said.

Workplace experience naturally depends on the career of choice. For example, criminal justice students at UNH are often interested in federal law enforcement and do internships with the FBI, the DEA or ATF; some choose to work with local police departments. UNH is, however, seeing a boost in interest in the nonprofit side of criminal justice as students are looking at opportunities in areas such as crime prevention, victim advocacy, recidivism reduction, parole or probation.

"Over the last 5 or 6 years, we've seen a large shift from the students wanting law enforcement to a focus on careers where they can really have impact, some meaning in their work and give back to their communities," added Caporale.

Across the subjects of study, the main intention is for an internship to lead to a paid position.

"If you get an offer out of it, that's phenomenal. It's the point of the internship, which also gives the student opportunity to explore the field and test it out in not as risky of an environment. If they realize that it's not what they wanted to do, they still have time to shift before they have rent or loan bills," he explained.

"It's important to have those connections, alumni engagements and bringing opportunities to our students, but even with all the work that we do to close that gap to bring employers in front of students, students need to understand that while the school is doing a ton, each student also has to do a ton," Caporale concluded. "It is their careers, their majors, it's their area of interest. And so while the school is going to put a lot of things in front of them, it's important for our students to self-motivate, self-advocate, grab those opportunities, ask those questions, put themselves in the best position." ■

Melissa Nicefaro is a writer for magazines and business publications across Connecticut. She lives in Orange with her husband and two daughters.



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**IN THE FOOTSTEPS
OF A WARRIOR:**

Honoring the Legacy of Trudie Lamb-Richmond

By WUNNEANATSU LAMB-CASON

“Our knowledge, our stories do not belong to just us. They are meant to be shared for future generations.” This is the consistent sentiment of lifelong Connecticut resident, Trudie Lamb-Richmond (“Trudie”). At the intersection of education, advocacy and indigenous communities is the thread of her influence, intricately woven into the very tapestry of Connecticut’s learning landscape.



Born in Bridgeport in 1931, Trudie was the eldest child of John and Margaret Ray. John was born and raised in Newtown

where his father was a driver for a wealthy family. Relocating from North Carolina in the late 1800s, his parents’ move to Newtown marked them as the sole Afro-Indigenous family in town. Before the move, John’s mother, Mary, sought employment as an English teacher but was unsuccessful among the challenges of the Jim Crow South. Despite adversities, Mary emphasized the importance of education for her children and, eventually, her eldest grandchild, Trudie. Trudie’s mother, Margaret, was a citizen of the Schaghticoke Tribe near Kent. Trudie was heavily influenced by her maternal relatives and her indigenous culture and history. These early influences laid the foundation for Trudie’s lifelong commitment to education and community involvement.

ADVOCACY

Trudie was a leading voice for indigenous educational and political issues for over 60 years. She was an author, professor, anthropologist, storyteller and Native American rights activist. She leaves behind a legacy of scholarship, advocacy and cultural preservation. A strong matriarch, respected elder and fierce intellectual warrior, Trudie was often described as a force to be reckoned with. Her daughter, Erin Lamb-Meeches, recalls, “My mom began taking my brother and me to protests in the 1960s, even boycotting her favorite wine because of their treatment of field workers. It was her advocacy for human and women’s rights that are interwoven into my earliest memories. I remember sitting under the dining room table as



she spoke with other women about what positive effective changes they could work toward for women's rights."

In 1973, Trudie traveled to Wounded Knee, South Dakota, to stand with the people of Pine Ridge and members of the American Indian Movement. As a single mother, Trudie was reluctant to leave her children to lend her support to the movement. Ultimately, it was her children who made the decision. According to Lamb-Meeches, "My brother, Jason and I, who were 13 and 11 at the time, told her 'Mom, you have to go! It's so important.'" Trudie arrived at Pine Ridge on March 1, 1973, and remained for over 40 days of the 71-day armed occupation.

While Trudie was a staunch advocate, she was known for

her soft-spoken voice and gentle generous spirit. She led through her unassuming nature, dedication to her people and remarkable conviction to always do what is right. Trudie married her husband, David Richmond from the Akwesasne Mohawk Reserve in upstate New York, in 1983. Known for her unwavering hospitality and kindness, Trudie and Dave often opened their home to Native people, whether for a meal and warm bed, or a meeting place to discuss the latest land, water or civil rights issues occurring in Indian Country.

In 1974, Trudie, alongside Brian Myles, co-founded American Indians for Development (A.I.D) to provide essential resources, employment and educational services for indigenous people residing in the state. Situated

in Meriden, A.I.D emerged as a vital community center where indigenous people found a home away from home, forging lifelong connections and friendships.

EDUCATION

Trudie mentored generations of indigenous leaders, educators, museum workers, archaeologists and anthropologists, leaving an enduring imprint on those who worked closely with her. Her career in museums began in the 1980s when she became the director of education at the Institute for American Indian Studies in Washington, Connecticut. She poured herself into the programs, exhibits and visitors there for over a decade until she had the unique opportunity to be part of the ground-level team that

would lay the foundation for the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center. As their program manager of education, Trudie designed workshops, school programs and educational curriculum as well as assisted in exhibit content. If you visit the main village exhibit at the Pequot Museum, you can still listen to Trudie's voice on the audio guides.

"She had a sustained impact on me and how I have approached the broader Native community as an ally," Dr. Mancini, former executive director of the Pequot Museum and current executive director of Connecticut humanities, reflects on her influence. "So many lessons, conversations and interviews are indelibly printed in my mind. She has shaped my life and sensibilities in powerful ways, and I embrace her warrior spirit as I continue my life in allyship."

Dr. Nick Bellatoni, emeritus Connecticut State Archaeologist, wrote in an email shortly after Trudie's passing: "I met Trudie while attending Indian Affairs meetings many years ago. She taught me a great deal about Indian Affairs and Native culture and influenced the way I conducted myself as state archaeologist. She was a powerful educator who used empathy and storytelling to great effect in a traditional Native way. Her wisdom and deliberate voice at meetings I can still hear, influencing all those that sat around the table with her."

Trudie was a guest lecturer and adjunct professor at several of Connecticut's leading academic institutions including Yale, Wesleyan, University of Connecticut, University of Hartford and Western Connecticut. University of Connecticut professor Dr. Kevin McBride offers a deeply

personal perspective, describing Trudie as one of the most influential figures in his career. Their connection, spanning over 40 years, reflects a mentorship that was more than a professional bond. "Trudie was my mentor, teacher, colleague, best friend and wine-drinking buddy. I learned so much from her in the 40 years I knew her and think of her every day," shares McBride, highlighting the multifaceted nature of their relationship. His daily reflections on her impact emphasize the enduring legacy she left not only in

the professional realm but also in the personal lives of those fortunate enough to know her.

INDIAN RIGHTS/CULTURE

In 1982, she was elected tribal chairperson of the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation—the only woman ever. Her dream was to see the tribe thrive in their sovereign governance economically, culturally and academically. Trudie served on the Connecticut Indian Affairs Council and was appointed to the Legislative Indian Task Force by Governor William O'Neill in



1987. It was through these roles that Trudie was able to be a voice for Connecticut's Indigenous Peoples, advocating for legislation and policies concerning economic jurisdiction, reservation development and educational programs for tribal youth.

Trudie was an accomplished lecturer and captivating master storyteller; she was a culture bearer and traditional keeper of stories, participating in cultural exchange programs worldwide including one trip to Hong Kong, China. She once visited her granddaughter stationed in Italy and took time to share stories and talk about Native American culture at the local elementary school. Trudie was the recipient of the First Peoples Fund Community Spirit Award for her contributions as a storyteller and efforts to maintain a sense of pride and community amongst indigenous people. Fittingly, her name, Kekiokwashawe means "she gathers the people."

Trudie Lamb Richmond's legacy lies not just in her accomplishments but in the essence of who she was at her core. In her final months, as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease slowly erased her memories and identity, her compassion and humanity continued to shine through. In a poignant moment, seated in a hospital bed, Trudie turned to her daughter, Erin, with a series of questions: "How many children do I have?," "How many grandchildren?" "What is my role?," and "I'm not sure what I should be doing."

Amidst the fog of confusion, Trudie quietly lamented, "I don't feel like I've done enough." Trying to console her, Erin said, "Mom, you've done so much for so many people! You've accomplished so much for so many; it's time for you to rest and allow someone else to continue what you started." Trudie's quiet yet firm reply resonated with a profound truth: "We should never say we're done. There is always one more woman who needs a helping hand, one more child who needs an education. We should never say we are done."

In these poignant words, Trudie encapsulated the essence of her life's purpose: a tireless advocate for others and a compassionate force that believed in the



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perpetual journey of making a positive impact, particularly for marginalized communities. Even in the face of debilitating illnesses, her spirit remained undaunted, an unwavering testament to her enduring commitment to the well-being of others. Her influence reverberates through the Connecticut halls of academia, the corridors and archives of our museums, and in the hearts of those who knew her. As we explore the Connecticut landscape, from university campuses to tribal powwows and cultural gatherings, her ripple effect is palpable. Trudie Lamb Richmond's legacy, therefore, goes beyond the tangible achievements and stands as a reminder that the true measure of a person lies in the compassion and determination that resides within their core. 📖

Wunneanatsu Lamb-Cason (Schaghticoke/ HoChunk), Trudie Lamb-Richmond's first-born grandchild, is a traditional storyteller, published author and founder of Eastern Woodlands Education Consultants, LLC. She works as an educational consultant and high school history teacher in Virginia where she lives with her husband and five children.



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AT HOME

with KERRI-LEE

Embracing the Journey Into a New England Spring

By Kerri-Lee Mayland

It is such a relief every year! As much as I love winter for all the outdoor sports and cozy snow days at home, I'm always ready to bid farewell to its icy grip when St. Patrick's Day or Easter nears. The mud months mean it's time to prep for the growing season. When I walk around my yard as the temperatures rise to assess any damage left behind, I can't help but get excited seeing the first signs of life. The drab colorless landscape will soon give way to a multitude of blossoms and blooms; that is something to celebrate! We will be doing exactly that, and showing you some of our favorite things about a Connecticut spring on the next At Home With Kerri-Lee coming soon!

But that being said, we live in New England, so we are well-acquainted with unpredictable weather. Mother Nature teases us with false starts, twists and turns before the last frost has safely passed. Maybe you too have been burned by planting before Mother's Day, only to have a ferocious late frost obliterate your eager intentions. Guilty as charged over here; it's an expensive lesson to learn the hard way.



So, let's practice a little patience, and look at some ways to get your green thumbs geared up while you wait for the good weather to arrive and truly be here to stay.

START SOWING INDOORS

The sun may be teasing us with its warmth, but the soil may still be too cold for some plants. So, start seeds indoors in containers. A friend of mine does "winter sowing" and uses recycled milk jugs like

little greenhouses to plant her flowers; the little seedlings are good to go when the ground is ready. It's a great way for your plants to develop strong root systems and hit the ground running.

WATCH THE FROST DATES

This is the "don't plant before Mother's Day" deal again. New England is notorious for late frosts that sneak up when you least expect them. If you are rolling the dice and taking your chances, be prepared to protect tender plants with row covers or blankets. This might help safeguard your hard work from pesky cold snaps.

CHOOSE HARDY VARIETIES

Pick plants that are well-suited to our climate. It sounds obvious, but it's a common mistake. Opt for hardy varieties that can withstand fickle weather. Cold-tolerant vegetables like kale, spinach and peas are my favorites for early spring planting, and they make for delicious crops later in the season.

PREPARE THE SOIL

Before breaking ground in your garden beds, assess and nourish the soil. Our soils can be heavy and



compacted—mine is dense clay—so incorporate organic elements to improve drainage and fertility. (Pro tip: Start saving eggshells and use a banana under plants like tomatoes and peppers and many flower-producing plants. The calcium and potassium will do wonders when it comes to the plants' performance.)

CONSIDER CONTAINER GARDENING

For those of us who can't wait to get our hands dirty, this kind of gardening is a great solution! Planting in containers allows you to move your garden indoors if a late frost is in the forecast, while also providing flexibility in rearranging your garden as the season progresses.



TRAIN TROPICALS

Buy palms and get them thriving indoors, so they are healthy and strong and ready to go outside for a tropical vibe once it's warm enough. My palm will be poolside at my house very soon. We often think of them as tropical greenery that will only grow in the Deep South, but plant them in a container that can be moved inside and out. Once the weather is nice, they will love the sun and fresh air.

MULCH MINDFULLY

Mulching is not just decorative; it helps to regulate soil temperature and conserve moisture, as well as natural weed control. However, be cautious about the timing of mulching in early spring. Applying mulch too early can insulate the soil, preventing it from warming up. Wait until the soil has had a chance to absorb some sun first. (Pro tip: When it comes to weed control hacks, vinegar takes center stage. Mix it in a 1:1 ratio with water and a few drops of liquid soap, then spray directly onto weeds when they are hot and vulnerable. Miss your plants though, it will kill them too.)

EARLY BLOOMERS

Plant the first warriors of spring, and that doesn't have to mean just daffodils or tulips. Early-blooming flowers and shrubs have a lot of variety and will give you the burst of color you are craving. Here are just a few of my favorites:

- **Pansies and Violas:** Hardy and resilient, they can withstand whatever early spring throws their way.
- **Crocuses and Snowdrops:** Plant these bulbs in the fall for dainty blooms strong enough to push through spring snow.
- **Forsythia and Witch Hazel:** These are both shrubs with brave yellow blooms that come out before their leaves emerge and offer the first bit of spring color

We are so close, friends; hang in there and soon endless warm, sunny days will be here to stay. Hopefully these tips will help keep you busy and feeling productive while you're waiting to get in the garden.

I would love to see what you are planting this spring, so please share your gorgeous gardens with us, and maybe they will be on our next show! Send them to athomeklm.com.

In the meantime, get ready to get your hands in the dirt, and happy spring! 🌱

Happy everything friends!

xx *Terri Lee*



Visit athomeklm.com for upcoming show times and behind the scenes video.



Photo by Lam Nguyen Photography





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Connecticut's Greatest Athlete?

By TONY RENZONI

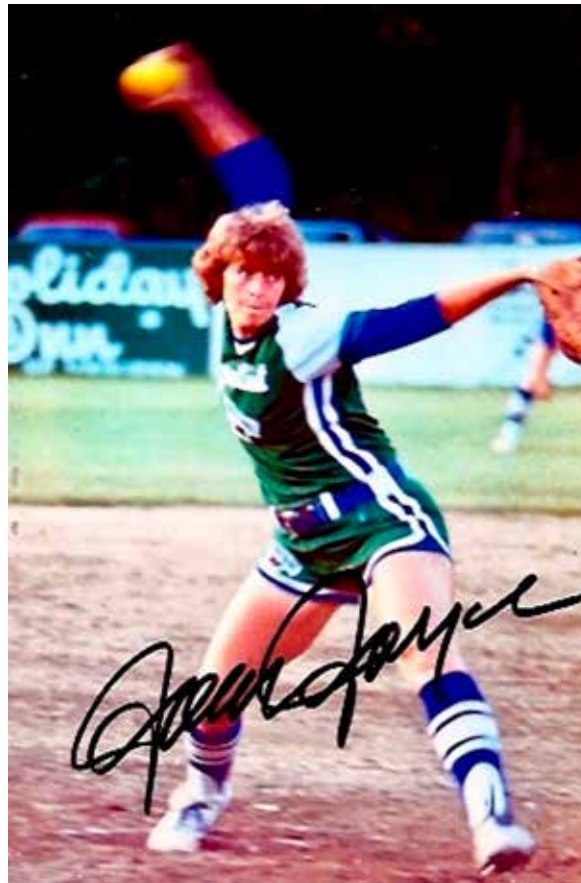
Joan Joyce has long been considered the greatest female athlete in sports history. This sentiment has been echoed by many sports critics, historians, teammates, rivals, journalists and fans. Is she considered Connecticut greatest athlete?

In her prime, Joyce was the most feared female pitcher in fast-pitch softball. She was a famous female softball pitcher in the United States, Europe, China and other parts of the world. For example, Joyce pitched a no-hitter against a Chinese National All-Star team in Lanzhou (Lanchow) China—in front of an overflow crowd of 45,000 fans. The only batter to reach base for the Chinese team was by a walk in the third inning.

Joyce was revered by her opponents as well as her teammates. Her pitching success against several of Major League Baseball's greatest hitters—such as Ted Williams—gave her further recognition throughout the United States and worldwide. But her athletic accomplishments were not limited to the sport of softball. Joyce excelled in a variety of sports, setting records all along the way. And, most overlooked, Joyce was an extremely successful coach and referee.

At a time when the sports world was dominated by male athletes, Joyce stood

out as an equal. Her goal in life was to be one of the best athletes, male or female. By all measures, she achieved that goal and has earned a place among



Signed Joan Joyce photo. Credit: Joan Chandler

sports elites.

Keep in mind that Joan Joyce grew up at a time when females were banned from male-dominated sports and professional team sports. Many people who have witnessed her performance will testify that if she were allowed to play baseball on a professional level

with her male counterparts, she would have found a way to become at least an above average Major League Baseball player, especially since she adapted herself to a variety of positions on the ball field other than the pitcher's mound.

Over the years, certain women have achieved fame and success in individual sporting events (tennis, track and field, and others). But Joyce was a multi-dimensional athlete. She was a groundbreaking athlete whose dominance in team sports such as softball, basketball and power-volleyball gave rise to women who dreamed of expanding their participation in a variety of sports. Because of Joan Joyce, pitching mounds were extended by four feet, golfers were required to hit their shots farther, golf courses were marked differently, and opponents as well as teammates were inspired to play harder. But most of all, because of Joyce, boundaries were broken. Young girls growing up can now see themselves achieving fame and success as a member of a team sport and not just individual sporting events.

Because of athletic pioneers like Joan Joyce, women now have the chance for identification with a team and for work opportunities as coaches, administrators, broadcasters and endorsements after their playing careers.

In terms of excellence in a diversity of sports, Joyce is in an elite class, with



Superstars Arthur Ashe and Joan Joyce.



Ted Williams and Joan Joyce.
Courtesy of Brakettes Archives

only the legendary 1930s great Babe Didrikson (Zaharias) being mentioned in the same category. Didrikson excelled in golf and track and field. Joyce not only dominated the world of fast-pitch softball but also was a star athlete in basketball, power-volleyball, golf and bowling. Like Didrikson, Joyce took up golf later in life. She began playing golf seriously at age 37, while Babe was 24 when she began. And, like Didrikson, Joyce always believed that there was no sport that, in time, she could not excel in. In making a comparison between these two great athletes, one important and often overlooked fact that distinguishes Joyce from Didrikson is that Joyce had an extremely successful 34-year career as a referee and an 18-year career as a university golf coach. In addition, Joyce had a very successful career as Florida Atlantic University's head coach for nearly 30 years and, most noteworthy, a successful and highly regarded overall coaching career for over 60 years.

Fans that saw Joyce pitch in person were in complete awe as they watched Joyce pitch using her famed "slingshot" delivery. She would hurl the softball with such force and speed that many batters would swing at her pitches when the ball was already in the catcher's glove. As one frustrated batter was heard to say after batting against Joyce, "It would help if I was able to see the

ball!" Her pitches were extremely fast—equivalent to a 119-mph baseball, in terms of a batter's reaction time.

Joyce's career statistics are staggering and speak for themselves. She hurled 150 no-hitters, 50 perfect games, a career earned run average of .090 and over 10,000 strikeouts, just to name a few. The stats and records she set in other sports are equally impressive, including an Amateur Athletic Union tournament basketball record of 67 points in one game and an amazing Ladies Professional Golf Association and Professional Golfers' Association of America record of just 17 putts in a round of golf (that has not been broken in over 40 years). Unlike many other famous athletes,

"In several historic duels, Joyce easily struck out the great Ted Williams on several occasions, earning Williams's lifelong respect."

she has both a league and a stadium named after her. Amazingly, Joyce has been inducted into 21 Halls of Fame. In several historic duels, Joyce easily struck out the great Ted Williams on several occasions, earning Williams's lifelong respect.

Joyce has left an indelible mark on women's athletics. Throughout her playing and coaching career, she has been a champion of women in sports. Joyce has created a legacy that has been a major contribution in bringing women's athletics into the public spotlight.

So why isn't Joan Joyce a "household" name? The reason is two-fold. During her playing days, she received very little coverage from media outlets. (There was no ESPN in her day.) Although she was a charismatic, inspirational and talented person, Joyce didn't promote herself, unlike many of her contemporaries or today's athletes. Instead, she always gave credit to her entire team. She considered herself first and foremost a great teammate and all her teammates would agree with that.

Joyce was a humble individual who preferred to stay out of the limelight. But many times the spotlight found her. In 1995, Joyce took her young FAU first-year team to watch the U.S. women's softball team practice in Orlando, Fla. The team was practicing for the 1996 Summer Olympics held



Joan Joyce holding the 1976 Champions flag.
Credit: Kathy Gage



Joan Joyce as the FAU Head Coach during a game.
Courtesy of Joan Joyce

at the Golden Park in Columbus, Ga. Besides observing the play of the U.S. team, the hope was that her players would get to meet some of the future Olympians and possibly get some autographs.

But at the end of the practice, the U.S.

players spotted Joyce, and immediately surrounded her, asking for her autograph. Although much younger, all the U.S. players knew of Joan Joyce's greatness and asked Joan to demonstrate her famous slingshot delivery.

With the goal of getting Joyce

the true recognition she deserves, several projects are underway. The "Connecticut Softball Legend Joan Joyce" book by Tony Renzoni has been turned into a musical play called "Joan Joyce! The Musical." The play has been performed in front of sold-out

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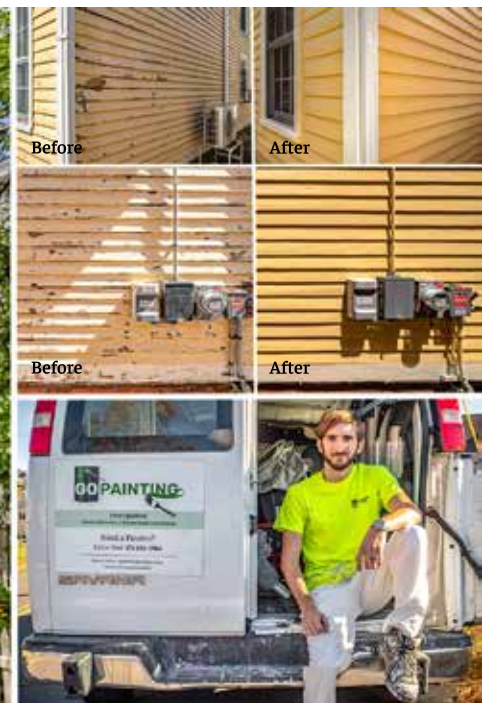


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Joan Joyce and Billie Jean King. Credit: Joan Chandler

performances with 15 performance runs in several established theatres in Connecticut. A children's book, "Joan Joyce: The Wonder Girl" co-written by Keely Baisden Knudsen, Lauren Salatto-Rosenay and Tony Renzoni, has been released with the goal of having children learn all about this amazing athlete.

So, was Joan Joyce Connecticut's greatest athlete? The answer is a "Yes." If the question involved her dominance in only one sport such as softball, a case can be made for other athletes who excelled in their specific sport. However, Joyce excelled at a high level in a variety of sports, setting records not only in softball, but in basketball, golf and other sports. For example, her record of 17 putts in one round of golf (a ladies' LPGA and men's PGA record) has not been broken in over 40 years. Even with her countless achievements in softball, Joyce and her dad felt she was



Joan Joyce Day. Courtesy of Kathy Gage

better in basketball (her favorite sport) than softball. She also had a very successful career as a college golf coach, referee and FAU head softball coach. This is the reason why she has been inducted into 22 Halls of Fame. 🏆

Tony Renzoni is the author of "Connecticut Rock 'n' Roll: A History"; "Connecticut Softball Legend Joan Joyce"; "Connecticut Bootlegger Queen Nellie Green"; "Historic Connecticut Music Venues: From the Coliseum to the Shaboo"; "Connecticut's Girls of Summer: the Brakettes and the Falcons"; "Joan Joyce: The Wonder Girl"; and "Rock 'n' Roll Connecticut: Magic Moments and Unforgettable Disc Jockeys."




Hope, Change and Progress: Hospital for Special Care's Inpatient Autism Unit Impacts the Community

By ARIANA RAWLS FINE

With current statistics showing one in 36 children having autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the need for more in-depth, interdisciplinary services continues to rise, especially for those who have exhausted available community care and are in acute behavioral crisis. Serving Connecticut residents for over 80 years, Hospital for Special Care answered the call by opening its outpatient center in 2012 and

then the inpatient unit in 2015 in New Britain. As the center, expertise and need grew, the hospital created an 18,000-square-foot, \$13 million inpatient unit with 20 beds for children and adolescents with ASD in 2020 and a partial hospital program in 2021. The programs have been recognized nationally, ranked fourth of 90 programs in a 2021 study conducted by Stanford University's Center for Clinical Excellence, said Lynn Ricci, Hospital of Special Care's president and CEO.



The Autism Inpatient Unit is an interdisciplinary program for those experiencing severe and treatment-resistant behavioral symptoms or related to ASD, such as aggression, self-injury or psychiatric functioning declines. The hospital unit's staff provide a step-down/step-up solution to support children with any level of care needs. The unit offers therapeutic recreation, occupational/speech and language therapies; applied behavior analysis (ABA); educational activities in a highly structured day; intensive parent training with practicing behavior management; collaborations with the child's prescriber, outpatient services team and community providers; and more.

GETTING THERE: THE ROAD TO INPATIENT CARE

"The first message we want families to hear is, 'you are not alone.' There are services and a way to help," said Dr. Lauren Herlihy, Ph.D., the unit's director of autism psychology and a clinical psychologist trained at University of Connecticut and Yale Child Study Center. Ricci has a child with autism and recalled a time she sat down with Dr. Sabooh Mubbashar, the Autism Inpatient Unit's medical director. He mentioned that a lot of parents ask, "Why me, why my child?" He talked about moving from that place to, "Where do we go from here?" There is a journey of light after the diagnosis, and it isn't all doom and gloom, Ricci added.

On average, the 20 inpatients spend 30-40 days in the program to get a start on medications, stabilizing harmful and unsafe behaviors, and more, stated Dr. Herlihy. "We also collaborate with providers who are going to receive our patients either in home or in



our hospital program, which is a step-down, half-day program where patients sleep at home and attend their own schools but come to us for additional therapies in the afternoon."

"Our goal for all of our kids is for them to go back to their homes, families, schools, and regular ABA or other therapies within the community after our program. Just with additional tools," added Meghan Gallagher, a clinician and the unit's practice manager for autism services. The Partial Hospitalization Program delivers supports for children to transition from an inpatient stay back into the community.

WORKING WITH FAMILIES


"This is a unique program. We are assessing not only what is happening with the child but also with the families and at home. We want to target the needs from the beginning of their stay," said Joselyne Canchanya, LMSW, the autism inpatient unit's discharge planner and one of two social workers there. "We give parents




Ally Gomes

Ally and her family had reached crisis. Ally has autism spectrum disorder, and was unable to express her needs in a safe and healthy way, leading to unsafe behaviors. She was admitted to the Autism Inpatient Unit where she received medical care, behavioral interventions and learned healthy coping skills. Her family also attended regular caregiver training sessions. After three months, Ally was able to transition back home with her family with new found emotional, behavioral, communication and daily-living skills.

View their recent video at
youtu.be/SfSAXuqwjk8.



Lauren Herlihy, Ph.D.,
director of autism
psychology



Hassan M. Minhas, M.D.,
chief of autism services



Sabooh Mubbashar,
M.D., medical director,
Autism Inpatient Unit

a minimum of 7-days notification about when their child is coming home. We have a final meeting with them where we go over the paperwork for discharge and the medications, and meeting with the clinical coordinator; we go over every single step. Even though the kids are stable in our unit, they will experience a transition even to go back to the car, to the home, to school.” She added that having bilingual staff is key for families who are scared to reach out because of language limitations.

WORKING WITH AND IN THE COMMUNITY

“As leaders in the community and the treatment of severe behavior problems and autism, we also have the ability

to consult and train partners when it comes to accessibility,” Dr. Herlihy said. “Such as how a place like the Connecticut Science Center can make their programming more accessible to neurodiverse visitors. We’ve done training with first responders who are eager to understand how to manage and support patients in a way that is safe for everyone.”

The unit’s providers train others in school districts and in specialized therapeutic schools to help educators doing the hard daily work of educating students but who need more psychiatric or medication support, or support for parents on how to manage behavior outside of school hours.

Children with severe behavioral issues often end up in the emergency room

(ER). The unit has an ER diversion program where the ER can consult with the outpatient department’s psychiatrist to divert the patient to the outpatient clinic for an emergency spot, to the partial hospital program or into the acute inpatient program.

CREATING THE RIGHT PEOPLE FOR THE JOB

“Our biggest limitation is really human resources,” said Ricci. The unit and clinicians encourage talent and workforce development with a comprehensive training program for APRNs. They partner with local APRN programs where the nurses spend months working with Dr. Hassan M. Minhas, chief of autism services, and



The Gonyea Family

Danielle and John Gonyea’s three sons, Gryffin, Zealand and Ronan, have all been diagnosed with ASD and needed more than Birth to Three could offer. Their pediatrician recommended the Autism Center, where the whole family works with psychologists and as well as speech, occupational and physical therapists to learn skills the family can maintain at home. The support they receive at the Autism Center enhances their ability to communicate with the boys and support their growth.

View their story at hfsc.org/stories/the-gonyea-family.



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Dr. Mubbashar to learn how to treat children with autism, explained Gallagher.

"It satisfies the APRNs' child psychiatric setting requirement. Because we have a large number of APRNs coming through our program, we have been able to recruit those APRNs to become more independent in their practice and see patients on the outpatient basis, in the partial hospital program and in our inpatient program," said Gallagher. "We see it as a win for APRNs who don't stay with us too because now we have other providers who can continue to be community partners. We also have social workers, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists and psychologists training on our units."

COMMUNITY FINANCIAL SUPPORT HELPS FAMILIES

With the hospital serving a population with 82% covered by Medicaid, it poses a challenging financial model, Ricci said. The hospital and the unit have philanthropy support and successful fundraising campaigns, but the funding is limited with providers seeing many parents in crisis as well. The connection and state partnership to preserve this resource is critical, Ricci said, but the community can help as the philanthropic funds are even more crucial to the program's viability and success in the community. The Harper Autism Fund, established in 2015 by Senator Joseph Harper, fills gaps for equipment or services for parents that otherwise aren't covered in a daily rate of Medicaid.

RECOGNITION AND REPLICATION

The outcomes show the program is working. Eighty-nine percent are able to avoid or shorten emergency room visits and 70% remain home with outpatient management, according to the unit's outcome data.

The Autism Inpatient Unit and its providers are recognized for the work they are doing. The outpatient program was named the nation's first Patient-Centered Specialty Practice (PCSP) for Autism Spectrum Disorder as determined by the National Committee for Quality Assurance as well as becoming the first level-three PCSP in the country, said Ricci. The services have also become a featured HFSC Neuroscience Center of Excellence program.

The reach, expertise and experience of the program and its clinicians travels beyond Connecticut's borders. Dr. Herlihy is the unit's clinician representative in the National Autism and Disabilities Consortium, a workgroup collaborative to share best practices, knowledge and deidentified outcomes data. She was recently named as the education chair for National Autism and Intellectual Disability Psychiatric Care Collaborative. Ricci has sat on the state of Connecticut's autism council for over 10 years to help inform policy and resource allocation.

It is the hope of the team that the Autism Inpatient Unit model and supporting programs will be replicated to help other healthcare providers in their own communities.

More information can be found hfsc.org. ■





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A photograph of an older couple laughing joyfully outdoors. The woman on the left is wearing a light blue shirt and a white visor. The man on the right is wearing a dark blue shirt and a dark blue baseball cap. They are both looking towards the right side of the frame. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting trees or foliage.

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DELICIOUS

Dip Into Deliciousness

By AMY S. WHITE





A good dip is the unsung hero of any get-together. Whether it's game day, cocktail hour or time at the pool, dips elevate snacks and turn veggies from "Blah!" to "Ahhh!" Making dips at home adds good healthy choices to the dip equation. Homemade dips combine the freshness of ingredients (which equals fresher flavor), the opportunity for nearly endless customization, and the satisfaction of putting something delicious on the table for people to gather around.

Good ingredients are imperative for any recipe, but

this is extremely true for dips, as typically little-to-no cooking is involved. Dips are easy to make when one considers their four main components. First, start with a base ingredient, which is usually a dairy product: cheese or cream cheese, yogurt, mayonnaise, or sour cream. Find a local dairy and support them by using one of their products. Some suggestions include Arethusa Farm (dairy stores in Bantam and New Haven, available in some markets as well), Smyth's Trinity Farm (Enfield), Hastings Farm (Suffield), Woodstock Creamery (Woodstock) and Oakridge Dairy (Ellington), which is operating as The Modern



Beet Tahini Dip (Gluten- and Dairy-Free)

Recipe courtesy of Chef/Owner Emily Mingrone of Fair Haven Oyster Co., Tavern on State, and Provisions on State, all in New Haven

Ingredients:

2 large beets
1 cup water
2 cloves garlic
2 cups tahini
1¼ cups lemon juice
3 tablespoons salt
½ cup extra virgin olive oil
Pepitas or other seeds for garnish

Directions:

Boil the beets in salted water until they can be easily pierced with a toothpick or fork. Cool and peel. Slice into manageable pieces and place in a blender with water and garlic. Once blended, add tahini, lemon juice and salt. Continue blending and drizzle in olive oil. Garnish with pepitas, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds or whatever you wish. Serve with toast points.

Santorini Fava Dip

Recipe courtesy of Dino Kolitsas, Chef and Owner of Greca Mediterranean Bar + Kitchen in New Milford

(Note: Santorini fava is a protected designation of origin produce item from the volcanic island of Santorini which you can find at specialty Greek markets or websites. Yellow split peas, which can be found in most grocery stores, may be substituted.)

Ingredients:

8 ounces Santorini fava (yellow split peas)
1 cup finely chopped spring onions (8-10 stalks)
2 garlic cloves, crushed
2 tablespoons Greek extra virgin olive oil
2 sprigs fresh thyme
1 bay leaf
4 cups vegetable broth
Salt and pepper to taste
Capers, for garnish
Extra virgin olive oil, for garnish
Finely diced red onions, for garnish

Directions:

In a three-quart saucepan, combine all ingredients except salt, pepper and garnishes. Over medium heat, bring to a gentle boil, stirring occasionally to prevent burning. Turn heat down to medium/low, cover and cook until the water is absorbed (approximately 35-40 minutes). The peas should be extremely soft. If necessary, add ½ cup warm water and continue cooking another until the desired consistency is reached (5-10 minutes). When the peas are almost disintegrated, remove the bay leaf, stir gently and taste before adding salt and pepper. Mix with a wooden spoon by gently pulling the mash up against the sides of the saucepan. If a smooth texture is desired, continue to mix in this way for 5-10 minutes. Can be served warm, room temperature or cold. Garnish with pickled red onions, capers and a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil. Serve with warm pita or a toasted rustic bread.



RECIPES

Pickle Dip (Gluten-Free)

Recipe courtesy of Chef Ruby Van Guilder,
Fire by Forge in Hartford

Ingredients:

- 16 ounces pickles**
- 1 cup pickle juice**
- 1 quart sour cream**
- 1½ cups cream cheese**
- 1 bunch scallions, trimmed and thinly sliced**
- ½ bunch parsley, chopped**
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic**
- 1 tablespoon onion powder**
- 1 teaspoon hot sauce**
- ¼ cup grated parmesan cheese**
- 1 jalapeno, seeds removed, finely chopped**
- Salt and pepper, to taste**

Directions:

Remove the pickles from the jar and set aside a cup of the pickle juice. Chop the pickles in a food processor. Put all ingredients (including the chopped pickles and pickle juice) in stand mixer and mix on low speed using the paddle attachment, until combined into a whipped texture. Serve with chips.



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Add flavor with an herb, spice, extract or other condiment. A dash of hot sauce, a sprinkle of dill or a touch of paprika all work wonders. Texture is also important to a dip: add crunch with seeds or add chunks with chopped vegetables. Or leave it creamy, depending on what is you're dipping. Finally, an often-forgotten ingredient is acid. A squeeze of citrus or a dash of vinegar can really brighten the flavor of a dip and give it additional depth. Choose fresh herbs over dried and a squeeze of a real lemon over a bottled lemon juice. Taste as you go. It's much easier to add more seasoning than to take it out. Be mindful of consistency. If the dip is too thick, thin it out with a bit of olive oil or even water. Finally, make it ahead of time to allow the flavors to develop overnight in the refrigerator.

Here are a few inspirational dip ideas to start with. All three are gluten-free and vegetarian, and all three come courtesy of Connecticut chefs who are working at award-winning restaurants. The first is Beet Tahini Dip from Chef/Owner Emily Mingrone of Fair Haven Oyster Co., Tavern on State, and Provisions on State, all in New Haven. Mingrone was featured in CT Voice last fall and has been on Food Network's *Chopped* and was the first female to win "Best Chef of the Year" in the CT Restaurant Associations "Crazies" Awards, which she did in 2021.

Pickle Dip comes from Chef Ruby Van Guilder of Fire by Forge in Hartford, runner-up for "Best Restaurant Newcomer" in the 2023 Crazies Awards, and one of Connecticut Magazine's 2023 Best New Restaurants. Pickles have been trendy the past few years, with a pickle cupcake even finding its way to The Big E, courtesy of LuAnn's Bakery in Ellington. So why not turn pickles into a dip?

Finally, Santorini Fava Dip, a favorite from Greca Mediterranean Kitchen + Bar in New Milford, comes courtesy of Chef/Owner Dino Kolitsas. Greca has won several Connecticut Magazine's "Best of" awards, including Best Mediterranean/Greek Restaurant for the past three years. In this dip, "fava" is not fava beans, but Santorini fava, a protected designation of origin produce item from the volcanic island of Santorini which you can find at specialty Greek markets or websites. You can substitute with yellow split peas, which can be found in most grocery stores.

Oliver Putnam, the dip-obsessed character played by Martin Short on Hulu's hit show "Only Murders in the Building," exclaims in the second episode, "This is all I eat. Dips for dinner." As much as that is an unusual (and definitely not a suggested) diet, with a little bit of creativity, just about anything can become a dip. Some infamous dips that have made their way around America's tables include spinach and artichoke dip, onion soup dip, buffalo chicken dip, and even a dessert cannoli dip. If you can imagine it, you can dip it! 🍴

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Energy efficiency is the name of the game!

In the last few years, the state has strongly encouraged homeowners to convert their HVAC systems to electric even with higher than ever electric rates. However, these conversions can often be costly not just for installation but in the monthly electric bills thereafter. Instead, Quinoco recommends that customers focus on bringing those electric bills down by using their systems more efficiently.

Do

- *Schedule annual maintenance on your cooling equipment.* These vital service checks can catch small problems before they become big ones and will get you ready for a season of use.
- *Change your cooling system's air filter every 60-90 days.* Air filters catch dust and debris to not only improve your home's air quality but reduce wear and tear on your equipment.
- *Use a programmable or smart thermostat.* Setting the temperature to automatically adjust when you're not at home or sleeping can significantly reduce your energy consumption.

Don't

- *Continue pouring money into old equipment.* After 10-15 years, the efficiency of AC equipment drops significantly. For example, if your equipment had a SEER efficiency rating of 10 when installed in 2006, it would now be rated at a 7 due to age and use.
- *Try to outrun the EPA.* In 2020 the EPA concluded its phase out of producing or importing R22 Freon for

residential air conditioning systems. As a result, the cost of this refrigerant has increased based on supply and demand.

- *Keep your thermostat in the 60s when the 70s feel just as nice!* It might be a bit warmer inside, but you'll see immediate savings from making this slight change.



The Skinny on R22

R22, aka freon, is a very common refrigerant used in air conditioning units across the United States. Due to its negative environmental impact, the EPA has been phasing out residential use of R22 for over a decade; it is no longer being produced or imported. With many systems still using R22 today, here's what you need to know:

What is R22?

R22 (HCFC-22) is a chemical used in both air conditioning units and heat pumps. The liquid refrigerant runs through the system continuously, absorbing and releasing heat in order to provide cool air to the home.

Why did the EPA phase out R22?

When released into the air, R22

contributes to the depletion of the ozone layer. In an effort to protect the ozone layer and slow climate change, the EPA is phasing out production of many ozone-depleting substances.

How do I know if my unit uses R22?

If your air conditioning unit is more than 10 years old, it most likely uses R22. There are a few ways to know for sure. You can check the owner's manual or look for the data plate located on the outside condensing unit; both will be labeled with HCFC-22 if the unit uses R22. You can give us a call to have one of our technicians or comfort specialists come take a look.

What are my options if I have an R22 unit?

Most R22 units are nearing the end of their lifespan; it is only a matter of time before they will need to be replaced. Because R22 is no longer in production, the cost of this refrigerant has increased based on supply and demand.

Since the R22 phase out was completed in 2020, we've seen many customers replace their units. As these units age, not only is the refrigerant scarce but the parts to repair these systems are not as readily available. We strongly encourage homeowners to start budgeting now for a replacement unit as R22 supply decreases in availability each year.

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Connecticut Pet Owners Embrace the Exotic

Written and photographed by **STAN GODLEWSKI**

From an early age, most of us have had strong feelings about creatures that creep, crawl or slither, whether it's wanting to inspect them up close, or getting as far away from them as possible.

Still, it might be a little surprising to learn that although our social feeds overflow with cat and dog images, the Animal Protection Institute reports that nearly 50% of pets in the United States can be considered exotic, and a good many of those are slimy, hairy and/or scaly.

So, what qualifies as exotic? It is almost all pets that don't fit

under the domesticated dog/cat umbrella.

Exotics have six main categories when it comes to pets: amphibians (such as frogs and salamanders) reptiles (snake and lizards), birds, invertebrates (think tarantulas), fish and small mammals (such as guinea pigs, hedgehogs and sugar gliders). Large mammals like tigers and rhinos are exotics as well, making a sort of TV star sub-category, but it is illegal to own one almost everywhere.

Most pet owners with exotics just happen to like them and are not in it for the "wow factor" and the attention they might get wearing a snake around their neck or having a two-foot lizard





on a leash out in public. In fact, one of the most popular exotic pets today is a quietly entertaining creature, the African Pygmy Hedgehog.

Tamara Sevigny, of Old Lyme, was introduced to the hedgehog about 11 years ago by a cousin, and was so taken with their easygoing, gentle nature that she now raises them and sells all things hedgehog online at secthedgehogs.com.

She explained that hedgehogs are nocturnal, waking-up when the sun sets and staying active all night. "They love to run on wheels," she said, noting that they can run several miles each evening. At the moment, she had about 20 hedgehog adults and several babies, each kept in individual cages.

"They're very popular among teenagers and college students," she said while one of her hedgehogs named



"Franklin" listened in. "Probably because teenagers and college students are also nocturnal," she said with a laugh.

They have pointy little raccoon faces,

are covered with little porcupine-like spikes, and have little feet that feel like rubber. But they are, nonetheless, snuggly. Still, Sevigny doesn't recommend keeping more than one hedgehog in the same enclosure. They are solitary, territorial creatures, and won't get along with a roommate. But they can become affectionate towards their owners.

"They know you through scent and sound," Sevigny said. "They like to sit in the crook of your arm, hide their little face in there and go to sleep."

Sevigny sometimes keeps one with her while watching television, or even takes one when she does errands. A hedgehog is about 8-inches long and weigh about a pound, so it easily fits into the pocket of a hooded sweatshirt.



FROM SNUGLY TO ANTI-SOCIAL

Guinea pigs, another exotic, are also snuggly, said veterinarian Alison Bloom of the Kensington Bird and Animal Hospital. Guinea pigs, which are described by the Humane Society as “small, gentle and personable,” are among the best for first time exotic pet owners, she said.

“Out of all the exotic species I see, I think they’re the toughest and most resilient,” Bloom said, adding that nonetheless they need human interaction as they are social creatures. They should not be left in their cages as they need time to get some exercise and run around to explore.

People who might think that an exotic pet takes less maintenance than a cat or dog should think again. While a fish or guinea pig doesn’t need to be walked twice a day, they still need attention. If you are looking for a low-maintenance pet, think more along the lines of a tarantula.

“Been into spiders my whole life; I used to have imaginary friends who were spiders when I was little,” said Kelly Forenz, adding that tarantulas are quiet, clean and don’t take up much space. “That’s why they’re really awesome pets for people who live in the city or small apartments.” He added that you can go away and leave them for a week without worrying because, depending upon the breed, it may only eat once a week or even once a month.

The Manchester resident saw his first tarantula at Petco in 2009 when he was 15. It was a Mexican Flame Knee tarantula. When Forenz went back a few weeks later, he learned that tarantula sales had been banned in Connecticut, which was fine with his parents who were not enthusiastic about sharing their home with a hairy spider the size of a hand, even if it was in a tank.

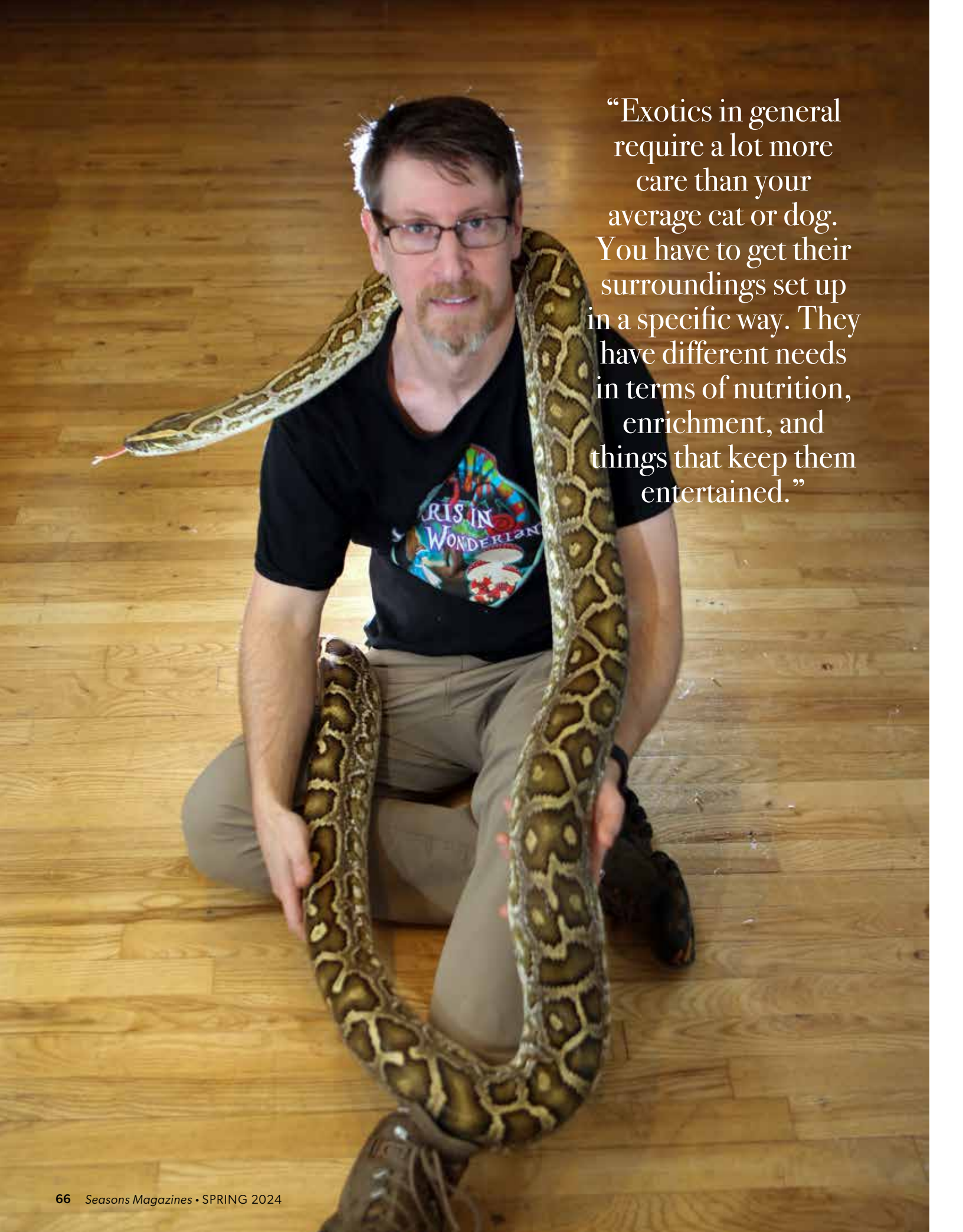
Most tarantulas are safe for humans to handle (emphasis on most). Forenz said that most U.S. tarantulas, or scorpions for that matter, are not deadly (although some are). They rarely bite and when they do, it’s similar to a bee sting. He said he’s handled hundreds of tarantulas and has never been bitten.

Nonetheless, pet stores in Connecticut still cannot sell tarantulas although they are not illegal to own. But they can be only bought privately. That’s how Forenz got his first tarantula when he was 22, and he’s been keeping them ever since.

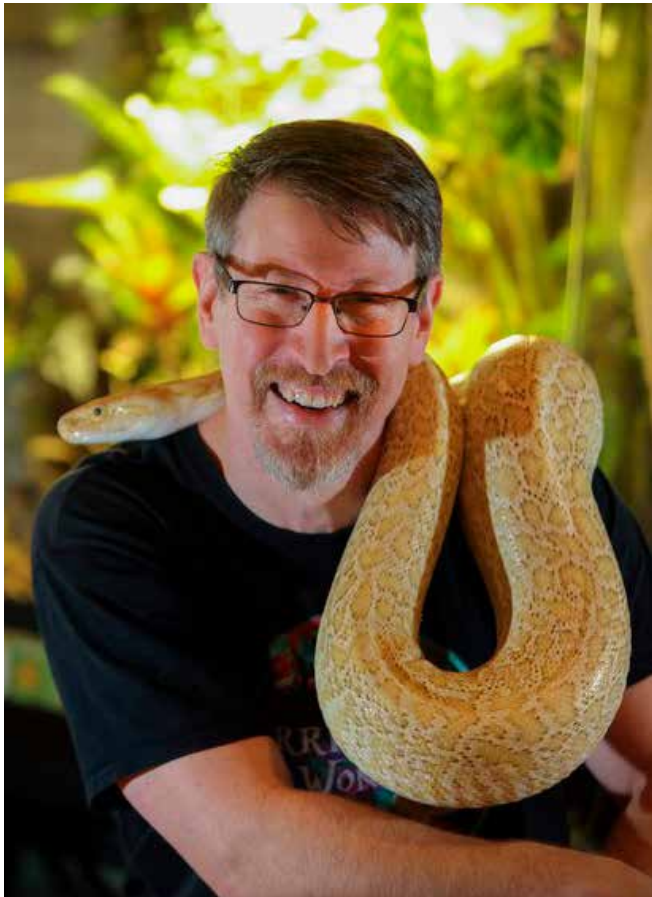
“I treat them the way you’d treat fish. Put them in a nice enclosure and I just leave them alone. They like to be left alone. They’re something I look at; I study and I breed them,” Forenz said of the spiders. “They operate solely on instinct...the animal just tolerates people.”

But that’s fine with Forenz, who isn’t into tarantulas for the companionship. At this point, he’s more concerned about conservation and preservation, considering the threat of declining populations and the loss of tarantula habitats to human expansion.





“Exotics in general require a lot more care than your average cat or dog. You have to get their surroundings set up in a specific way. They have different needs in terms of nutrition, enrichment, and things that keep them entertained.”



INDEPENDENT AND SOLITARY, BUT NOT ANTI-SOCIAL

An exotic pet is still a pet, a responsibility, and needs to be made part of the family.

“Definitely do your research because there’s a lot of care involved,” said Dr. Bloom. Her home includes two parrots, a red-tailed boa constrictor and two cats.

There is a common misconception that owning an exotic is somehow easier than owning a cat or a dog, Bloom said. Although you’ll never, for example, have to take your snake or hedgehog out for an early morning walk when it’s below freezing, there’s still a lot more involved than some people expect.

“I personally think [exotics] are harder to keep,” Bloom explained, but on the upside they also interact with their owners as most pets do. “Exotics in general require a lot more care than your average cat or dog. You have to get their surroundings set up in a specific way. They have different needs in terms of nutrition, enrichment, and things that keep them entertained.”

Each species requires very specific temperatures, humidity and light, according to Reptiles Magazine. Bearded dragons need an enclosure with both a basking hot spot of 100-110 degrees, and a cool end in the mid-70s. They also need a humidity level between 30% and 40%.

It’s especially important to meet an exotic’s specific needs as it can be more difficult to gauge their health and wellness, partly because many are prey species.

“A lot of times people don’t realize that their bird or their guinea pig might actually be sick, but they’re hiding it because in the wild if they’re acting sick they would get eaten....so a lot

of the signs that they’re not feeling well are subtle,” Dr. Bloom explained, adding that she recommends checkups every half year.

It seems that whether we’re talking about pet-owners and their Golden Doodles or their Burmese Pythons, the relationship is central.

“People definitely interact with their exotic pets the way they interact with cats and dogs,” Dr. Bloom said. “I’ve seen leashes for reptiles...and Pet Smart has a whole line of costumes for guinea pigs and bearded dragons.”

And still, as with all pets, it’s not all fun and dress up.

Although the bearded dragon has specific environmental needs, veterinary technician Erica Hayden owns one and thinks they’re the perfect starter reptilian pet.

“Bearded dragons are super popular right now. They have such a personality,” Hayden said, noting that these lizards are also easier to care for because they don’t have the same humidity requirements—up to 90% humidity—as other reptiles like chameleons, iguanas or pythons. Every other day, Hayden lets hers out to soak in a tub or run around the room.

Thebeardeddragon.org offers information and advice about getting and caring for the up to 2-foot bearded dragon. They first came to the U.S. from Australia in the 1990s, and have been increasing in popularity ever since.

RAISING EXOTIC PETS

Although there are many resources online with advice about care and buying food and habitat equipment, there’s nothing like having an exotic expert.

Adam Harris owns Harris In Wonderland in Canton,



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Connecticut, a 3,000-square-foot shop filled with fish, snakes, reptiles, and everything you need to establish and care for an exotic pet. He breeds, sells, and gives guidance and encouragement to people who already have or are just interested in an exotic pet. The shop is like a non-petting zoo, where people sometimes bring their children just to look.

“One of the reasons we have lizards and tortoises and things on display is so people know what they’re getting into, particularly people who think they want to buy a Burmese python. They’re very cute when they’re little but it only takes 3 or 4 years before they’re 10- to 15-feet long and you’re buying a gigantic tank and a heat panel and large food,” said Harris, who is speaking from experience.

Cashmere, his 15-foot python, helps out when he does educational programs at local schools, has been on TV shows in New York City, and has even co-starred in a photo shoot with Beyonce. In her down-time, Cashmere







will spend some time with Harris outside on a warm day or lay around the store after hours while he's doing paperwork. Even at 15 feet, Harris thinks a snake like Cashmere is an enjoyable companion to have around as well as the attention-getter. For him, she's not a lot of work.

Harris had his first brush with reptiles when he was 8, visiting his uncle in Louisiana. "There were lizards and snakes and a whole bunch of stuff just running around his backyard," Harris recalls, saying he brought home some American chameleons, and then got a box turtle.

"Unfortunately, at that time, there wasn't a lot of equipment or knowledge for keeping (exotics); it was a lot of trial and error," said Harris, whose fascination with reptiles led to a biology degree from Hartwick College and a career as the owner of the exotic pet shop that he started with his father Seth, who recently passed away.

Harris's father had a small business selling tropical fish from his childhood home in the 1940s, then opened a small store while a teenager. After a stint in the service and a 31-year career teaching high biology at Granby High School, he and Adam opened the store in 1999.

So maybe "exotic" pets aren't so exotic after all. In talking with any pet owner, there's an affection for and rapport with their pet whether it's a cat, dog, python or spider. It's something they connect with, care for and greet when they walk through the door at the end of the day.

And that's not an alien or exotic concept at all. 🐍

Stan Godlewski is a photojournalist based in Connecticut. His work has appeared in The Washington Post, USA Today, Der Spiegel, Hello, People and Seasons, among others.



Wheeler Clinic Moves Care to Where It's Needed

Fulfilling and Funding Basic Needs for Better Behavioral and Medical Health

By ARIANA RAWLS FINE

Meeting the behavioral health and medical needs of the most underserved Hartford area residents as a community center is a mission Wheeler Clinic has been fulfilling for over 55 years. Wheeler Clinic provides pediatrics for children and adolescents, and medical care for adults, at five outpatient community health centers in Bristol, Hartford, New Britain, Plainville and Waterbury in addition to mobile crisis services, statewide addiction referral, and in-home and community justice services.

Their medical services are integrated with on-site mental health and addiction services, which has proven effective for

well-rounded, central care. In Hartford, they offer dental care for all ages as well as nutrition and chiropractic services. In addition, Wheeler Clinic has a therapeutic special education day school in Plainville for students in kindergarten through age 21 from 60 different school districts across the state. It is a provider of foster care services in the state, particularly in the Waterbury area, among many other services. Wheeler Clinic's Basic Needs Fund assists with additional financial support for specific, non-reimbursable patient needs.

"All of our primary care teams—both the pediatric and the adult medical teams—have a behavioral health consultant attached to the team who is a licensed

clinician and does not carry a caseload or have scheduled appointments. The floating behavioral health consultant can be there when the clinicians need them. There continues to be a stigma for patients seeking behavioral health where they wouldn't walk in for that service. Today, when a patient comes in, they may be coming in for an annual physical, psychiatry appointment or a dental cleaning," explained Sabrina Trocchi, Ph.D., MPA, president and CEO.

"We implement tools without the stigma of feeling like there is something 'wrong' with them," said Trocchi. "Their follow-up appointments are also with primary care provider, not the behavioral consultant,

◀ Mott Corporation employees, known as Wheeler's Mott Health Ambassadors, have volunteered since 2016 to provide support for Wheeler and community events, such as conversations about addiction, recovery walks, toy drives, packaging basic needs items and more.



who may be brought in again if needed. Immediate care is implemented; it is much more effective with individuals who wouldn't schedule a separate behavioral health appointment. If we feel a higher level of intervention is needed, we will try and support that patient to engage in specialty behavioral health."

As Wheeler Clinic integrated more services into their model, they started to identify the barriers that their patients had to gain access to care, said Trocchi. Approximately 9 years ago, they began identifying and addressing these issues with the adult population at several sites when the patients were asked about the last time they saw their practitioners. Of those surveyed, 60% to 75% reported not having a primary care provider, or not feeling respected or welcomed at medical offices as barriers. If they had an issue, they went to the emergency room, which could result in not getting the appropriate level of care.

"It is hard to present to follow up with care when you don't have access to transportation, or when you haven't had a meal," said Trocchi. With the increase from 600 patients the first year to over 21,000 patients across five centers today, there was a high need for additional help. The organization began identifying services and supports that could be implemented that were not reimbursable by Medicaid or other programs that would increase access for patients to better their health. Wheeler Clinic's Basic Needs Fund was created to bring fundraising and donations to help them.

The fund goes where it is needed. Patients, based on where they live, may only be able to get to the center by bus. That can be a barrier with the hardship of coming to an appointment with multiple children and strollers, bus transfers and weather conditions, Trocchi explained. When a parent can't make it because of that, the funds may be used for Uber Health or other taxis services to bring them to the appointment and back home. Staff at the Wheeler Clinic health centers work hard with patients to utilize the most appropriate level of care. If a patient needs to be seen the same day, there is a barrier as Medicaid requires 48 hours to arrange medical transportation. Instead, the patient may go to the ER. In those instances, the staff will arrange for taxis from the fund.

Other examples include providing funds to purchase toiletries, clothing and more for a family who lost all of their personal items in a fire. When a patient had her cellphone stolen at a shelter, staff purchased a low-priced phone for her to be able to coordinate care when she did not qualify for other assistance programs to receive a phone. When a student is graduating and pursuing college or a technical school, they may need help purchasing equipment needed to start school or a basic laptop. In the winter months, they noticed that patients were coming in on very cold days without coats, scarves, gloves and hats. Funds were used to purchase cold-weather gear.

Overwhelmingly, food security issues in Wheeler Clinic's communities are a barrier for many of their patients. The funds are utilized to purchase groceries for families and patients in their programs. When a family experiencing financial hardship couldn't afford the oil needed to heat their apartment, the fund was used to purchase 100 gallons for them. Another patient in recovery who couldn't afford work boots for a new construction job received a new pair so he could start on his first day.

The Wheeler Annual Golf Classic was started in 1986 by a group of business leaders and companies to raise money for behavioral health and community-based services for children and adolescents. Proceeds from the annual golf tournament, being held this year on September 18 in Farmington, are directly linked to the basic needs program as are several mass distribution mailing, email and social media campaigns highlighting the ways the basic needs fund is utilized and the trends Wheeler Clinic is seeing.

"When we are engaging with someone in behavioral health services and primary care, and hunger is on their mind, you can't work with them on the other areas before addressing those needs," Trocchi said. Wheeler's Basic Needs Fund helps staff solve environmental and social issues that can affect a patient's health and well-being. "Our staff has flexibility in how they utilize the funds. The funds are about, 'What do you need to be healthier and to succeed?'"

Learn more at wheelerclinic.org/donors.

Exploring the Shift in Parental Support During Adolescence

By CAITLIN HOUSTON

We have all heard the proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child.” In most communities, support for new parents is very strong from birth until early elementary school. But at some point, the villagers start to back away for numerous reasons. Today, many parents feel lost and alone while navigating the new territory of adolescence.

Is there a change in the parental support system as children get older?

Parents are important anchors in their child’s life from birth. They provide a sense of security while also supplying basic needs. As young children rely on parents for nearly everything, many parents count on their village for support. This “village” consists of caring adults working in a collaborative effort to provide parents with support and resources.

In addition to family and friends, there are systemic resources which exist to support families and caregivers during the early years of parenthood. In Connecticut, the Office of Early Childhood oversees a network of early childhood care, education and development programs for the most critical years: birth to 5 years. Parents have countless resources at their fingertips from infancy through toddlerhood, preschool and early childhood. There is a wealth of information about every aspect of a child’s development.

Once a child enters kindergarten, resources become mostly school-based. Public education is the next step in government support for children and families after the age of five. Communication is consistent with parents and caregivers in the school system. But as both parents and children approach the adolescent stage, there seems to be a shift in the type of support readily available. The number of “villagers” dissipate, so what once looked like a bustling community now feels deserted.



Why do support resources shift for parents as children get older?

A possible answer is that the community wants to encourage independence in children.

Chrissy Khachane is a child development specialist, former educator and mother of three. She believes there is a growing body of research that supports the idea there is a shift in the community's involvement once a child reaches adolescence. Autonomy intensifies as adolescents begin to separate from their parents to find their own identity and think independently. Developing independence is a crucial part of growing up. It has numerous positive effects on a child's life, such as increased self-esteem and self-worth. However, there is a limit on how much freedom a parent can bestow on their child. Too much freedom can lead to poor decision making and unwanted risks.

The education system is one of the first places a child will find support during his or her quest for independence, especially once a child enters middle school. In sixth grade, there is a collective push for children to be self-sufficient with lockers, schedules and rotating classrooms. Guidance counselors meet with students to discuss educational goals. Children can choose their own school related extracurriculars, clubs and sports programs.

During the middle school years, parents are not instructed to take a giant step back from parenting. Instead, parents are expected to pause and observe while their children assert this newfound independence and make their own decisions.

As a result, many parents begin to feel disconnected from the system. Natasha Mendes, mother of twin boys in middle school, said, "Suddenly you have no idea what is going on at school unless your sixth grader tells you, which truthfully can be hard." As children explore more independence in school, parents are expected to become less dependent on the school system for updates.

If the school does not provide guidance, is it up to the community to supply resources?

Sara Tellerino, a mother of six children ages 3-14, said she noticed there are very few resources from the school system for navigating the later years of childhood. "Of course you can get support from the school for big issues, but if it's a general question about parenting an 11-year old, forget it. We sometimes have to be

willing to advocate for our children. No one comes to you and says they see your child struggling. We are expected to notice these things first."

Parents can build and grow their own village at any time—it just takes a little bit of work. A parent must network to build their village the same way we would network in a job or for a career. It takes a lot of courage and dedicated time to establish connections when we are juggling their family and career.

"The information coming from the school to parents drops off drastically when you switch to middle school. There is a PTO at the school...I did try to go to meetings in the beginning, but there weren't a lot of parents there, so I gave up," said C.B., a Connecticut mother of three. She is one of many parents who feels as if there is no encouragement from the schools or the community for parents to work together to navigate this stage of parenting.

Are there less resources for parents of older children because less parents are asking for help?

Khachane stated it can be difficult for parents of older children to ask for support because it challenges their credibility as a parent. As C.B. navigates the middle school years, she finds herself wondering if she is supposed to be encouraging independence, worrying if she steps in too much she may be perceived as a helicopter parent. Do parents want to admit they don't know what they are doing?

What it boils down to is this: there is no guidebook or introductory course for parents entering the adolescent stage of parenthood. For some reasons, society and the government put a lot of effort into helping parents through the first years of life, while the education system assists through the elementary years. Parents can build their own village of support from other parents, pediatricians and specialists—but, ultimately, they may feel still alone or lost. Resources for parents of older children do exist, they are just not distributed as they should be. ■

Caitlin Houston, mother of three, is the blogger behind the self-titled Caitlin Houston Blog, an authentic life and style site established in 2008. Caitlin covers sometimes hard to talk about topics in the motherhood and mental health categories as well as New England living, style and family travel.

Resources for Parents

grownandflown.com: The large website offers community and advice for parents with children in middle school, high school and college.

favor-ct.org: FAVOR Connecticut provides family-focused, advocacy-based and culturally sensitive community services that improve outcomes and family well-being.

211ct.org: 211 is a free, confidential information and referral service that connects people to essential health and human services online and over the phone.

infoaboutkids.org: Leaders of seven American Psychological Association divisions formed a consortium to develop Info About Kids, a web resource center for behavioral science-based information on children, youth and families.

thehubct.org/teens: The Hub is a state-designated Regional Behavioral Health Action Organization serving Southwest Connecticut as a resource supporting and coordinating mental health, suicide awareness, substance use prevention and problem gambling efforts in 14 communities.



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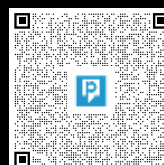


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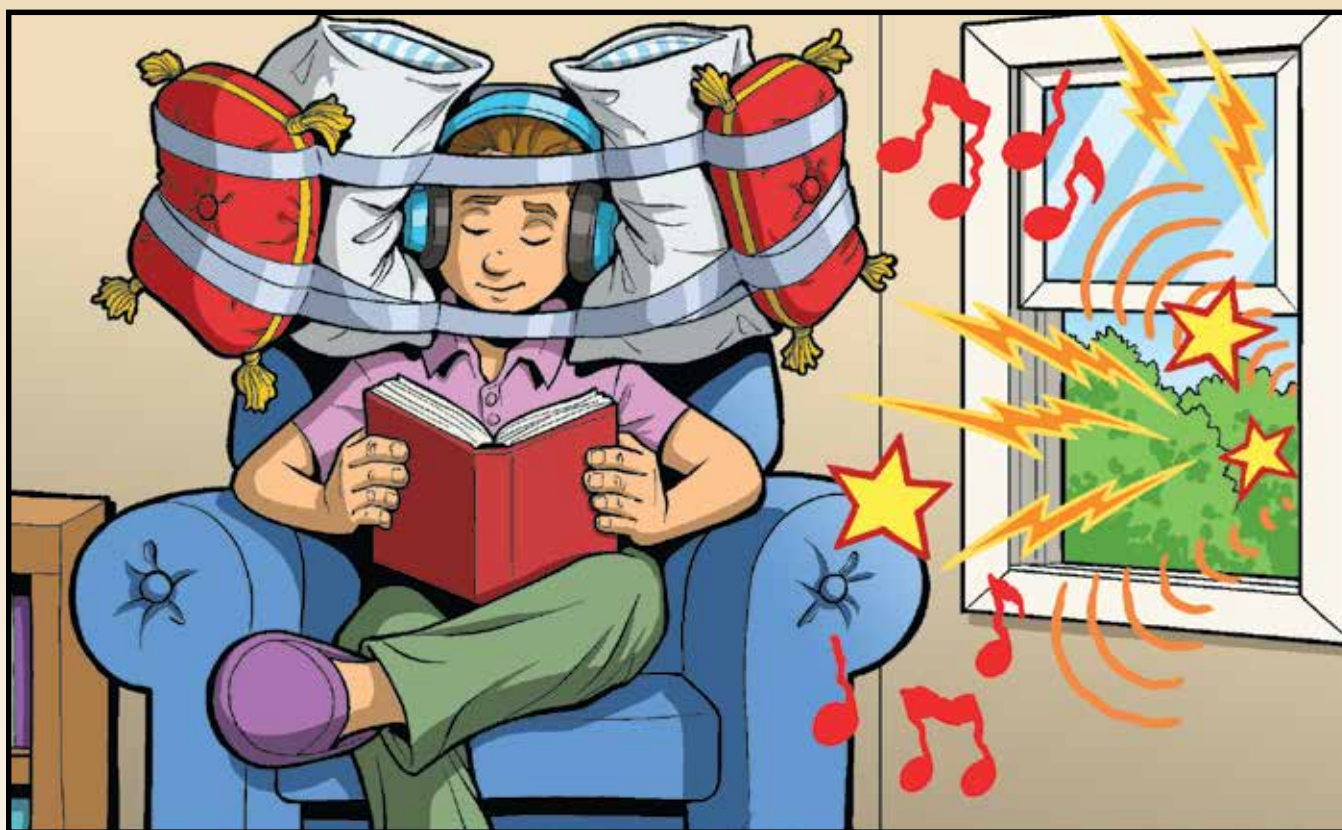
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The Sounds of Spring

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

It feels like years since I've last slid this small latch to the left. Years since I had to wander through the first floor of my home at night, checking to make sure the windows were all locked. They've been locked for months. Locked and shut ever since winter arrived with its cold, raw air, indignant wind and too infrequent snowstorms.

But at last, the first real day of spring has arrived. The ground is still muddy and wet. The trees are still bare. Snow is still piled in dirty heaps in parking lots. But the cold air has exited stage right, replaced by warm, fresh spring air. The thermometer has risen above 60 degrees for the first time since that disturbing, record-setting day in February and those two teaser days in March.

It's mid-April. Spring has officially arrived. It's time to open the windows again and let the fresh air inside. Goodbye, lingering winter viruses and Christmas tree particulates.

I'm so excited.

It's not easy to raise the sash. Clement Moore may have "flown open the sash" on Christmas Eve when Saint Nick arrived, but after a sturdy New England winter, it takes some muscle. But slowly, reluctantly, it moves, then slides and finally opens, throwing fresh air into my home at last.

I turn to open the next when I hear it, and I can't believe it. How is it even possible?

It's a leaf blower.

Across the street, my neighbor is clearing the leaves that he failed to clear back in October. The high-

pitched scream—a sound that has been blessedly absent from my life for almost 6 months—is back, invading the peace and solace of this spring morning. At least he doesn't have many leaves. A sad little sapling and a leaning maple from the neighbor's yard will make short work of this chore.

I can wait him out.

I move to the side of the house. I open the kitchen window. I hear it before I've even managed to open it completely.

Steely Dan. My neighbor is standing in front of his car. The hood is up. His toolbox is sitting beside him. And he's playing Steely Dan.

Steely Dan. Music for people who hate all things that sound good and right in this world. Steely Dan, blasting away in my neighbor's driveway but

now also blasting away in my kitchen, making even my wife's homemade chocolate chip cookies look sad and lifeless.

I can't believe it.

Then I hear a scream. Not a horror movie scream. Not the scream of a mother who has just witnessed aliens abducting her son. Not the screams of a person with good musical taste being forced to attend a Steely Dan concert. It's a child's scream. The senseless scream of a child running around outside, absent any discernible thought or purpose, just screaming his head off because he is young and loud and annoying. A moment later, he's joined by two more screaming kids. All three children are perfectly happy and content, yet scream they must as they flock through the neighborhood like starlings, bobbing and weaving and sprinting in synchronous stupidity.


Then a dog barks. Probably for no reason other than it's a dog, unless it, too, hates Steely Dan and is barking

in protest. At least I could get behind that. But probably not. The dog barks because a squirrel scurries across the lawn or a postal carrier walks up the block or a puff of wind puffs. The dog, almost as frustrating as the children, is making needless noise on this lovely spring morning.

I hang my head and sigh, not because of the noise that has stolen this moment from me, but for the many terrible moments that I am reminded will soon come. The endless droning of lawnmowers. The cacophony of a neighbor's cookout. The wailing sirens of police cars and ambulances. The low whine of airplanes flying above. The beat of drums from the nearby football field. Fourth of July fireworks. Fifth of July fireworks. Eighth of August fireworks. Thumping, indiscernible music blaring from passing cars. Men on motorcycles so desperate for attention while compensating for so little that they have converted their once reasonably sounding vehicles

into roaring, head-turning juvenile monstrosities.

A window is a hole in a wall that looks out onto the world. An open window is a hole in a wall that brings so much of the outdoors inside.

Fresh air is lovely, but the sounds that accompany that fresh air are not. I'm happy for spring's arrival. Happy to return to green grass and bright flowers and poorly played golf. Just let me get my headphones first. 

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

Sean Wang, an MIT architecture graduate, is author of the sci-fi graphic novel series, Runners. Learn more at seanwang.com.

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