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Seasons' Greetings



Dear Friends & Neighbors,

Though some of us long for winter to end, others lean in. Don Pelletier, a local ice climber, spends the season scaling sheets of ice in frigid conditions. Armed with rope, ice screws, an ax, and crampons on his boots for grip, Pelletier calculates every move he makes, knowing a fall could result in serious injury. As you'll see when you read his story (Traditions) in this issue, Pelletier believes the risks outweigh the rewards – in snow-covered mountains and forests, fueled by icy air, he determinedly rises inch by inch, reveling in the beauty and wonder of the season.

This issue is a tribute to people and traditions that inspire all of us to embrace winter. In our feature, "The Trick to Being Saint Nick," you'll meet men who portray Santa and discover how they cope with unusual circumstances and difficult requests. Columnist Matthew Dicks recalls the days when he and his brother gathered 'round the radio to hear the list of school closures with high hopes of a snow day (all was not merry and bright in the Dicks household). Our photo essay by Todd Fairchild introduces you to folks in our community you might not ever meet, because when they're up and about, you're likely dreaming.

As we conclude our 10th anniversary year, we want to thank our advertising partners and our readers for their support. *Seasons* now has a tie-in TV show, "Seasons Magazines Up Close," that debuted on Channel 3 on October 30. If you missed it, you can view the episode through the *Seasons* website. As you watch the show and peruse this issue, we hope you'll mix up a Velvet Rose (find the cocktail recipe in Delicious), spin some vinyl (our At Home story chronicles the comeback of LPs), and savor all this contemplative, majestic season has to offer.

For a full *Seasons* experience, please visit our website (www.seasonsmagazines.com), download our free app (*Seasons of Connecticut*), or connect with us through Facebook and Twitter. You'll find content that is entertaining, informative and local.

Happy New Year,
Deb Berry/Editorial Director, *Seasons*

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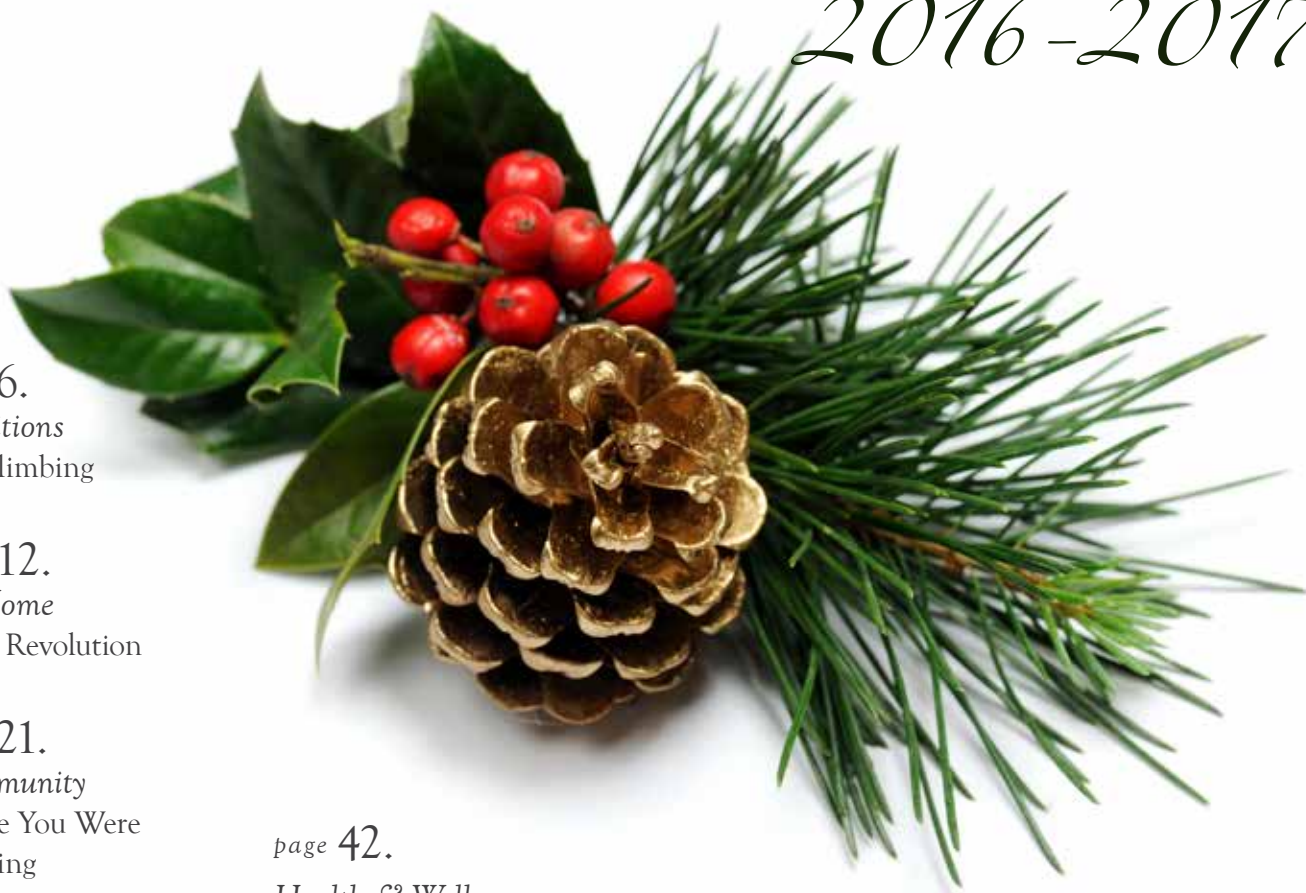
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SEASONS of the Northwest Hills™

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2016-2017



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“What good is the warmth of summer, without the cold of winter to give it sweetness.”
– John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*



TRADITIONS

THE ICEMAN COMETH: Don Pelletier, of Barkhamsted, inches up Mount Katahdin in Maine. "It's all about being outdoors, enjoying nature and getting a good workout," he says.



CHILLING OUT: Since Pelletier began ice climbing 35 years ago, the sport's popularity has increased, with everyone from teens to seniors getting in on the action.

Ice Climbing

The reason Barkhamsted's Don Pelletier ice climbs is simple; when you enjoy climbing mountains in warm weather, scaling the frozen faces of cliffs and waterfalls is what you do in the winter.

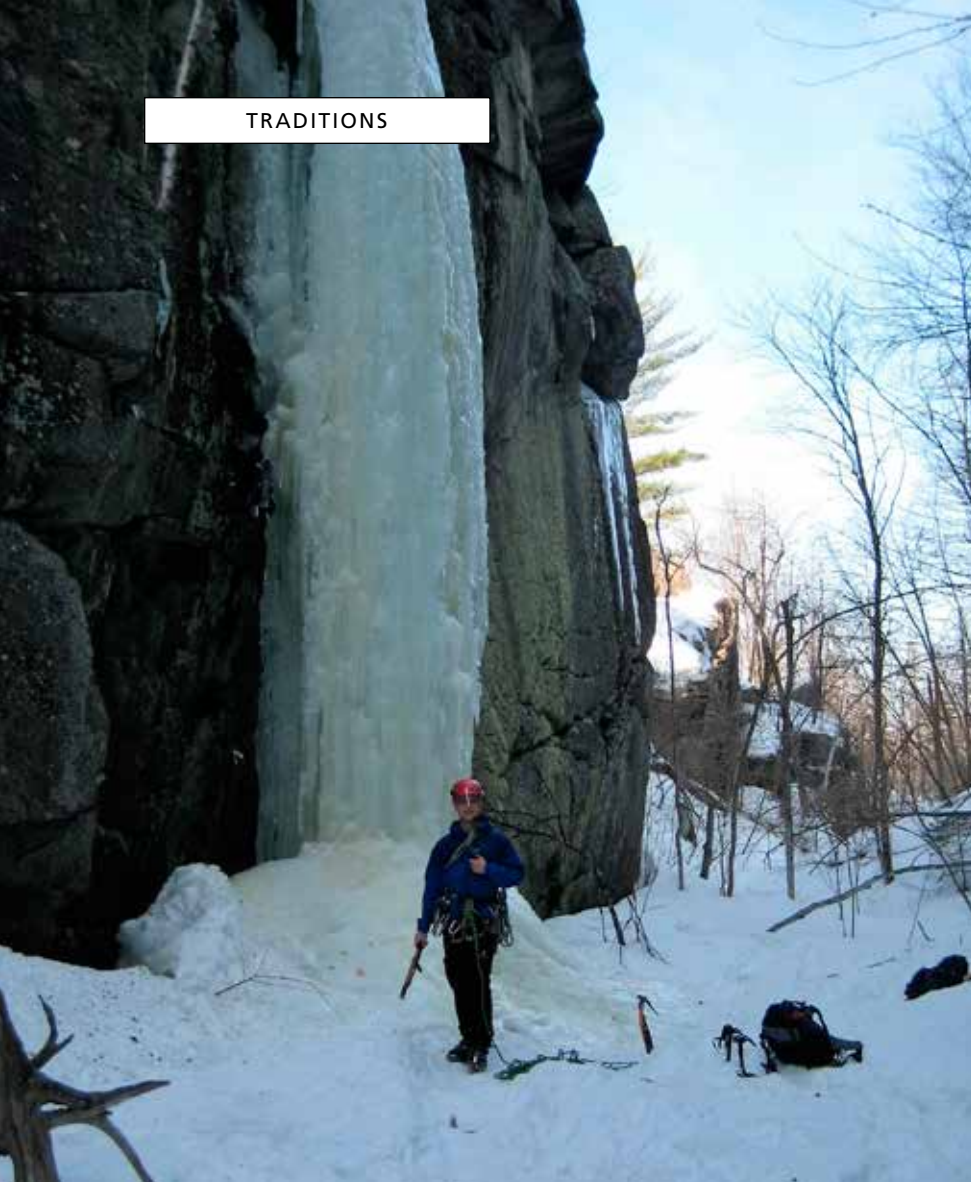
"I've been ice climbing for more than 35 years," says Pelletier, an avid outdoorsman who thru-hiked the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine some 40 years ago. "It's similar to rock climbing except you do it on ice, so there are some differences. It's all about being outdoors, enjoying nature and getting a good workout."

The strenuous activity involves climbing icefalls (frozen waterfalls) and ice-covered cliffs and rock slabs. The sport requires equipment used for rock climbing – rope, harness, and helmet – and additional gear, too. Rigid and warm specialized boots, ice tools (such as ice axes), crampons and ice screws, as well as proper winter apparel are musts. "You must also be able to tolerate the cold," Pelletier says.

Pelletier, who logged only about a half dozen ice climbing days last winter due to the mild weather (he completed 16 climbs the winter before), plies slippery slopes in Connecticut and out of state.

Locally, People's Forest and the American Legion Forest in Barkhamsted, as well as Canaan Mountain – where ice flows range from 60 to 100 feet high – are great places to ice climb, he says. When he wants much higher ice cliffs, he ventures to the Adirondacks and Catskills in New York, the White Mountains in New Hampshire, and Mount Katahdin in Maine. "Usually, I go with another climber," he says, "and sometimes several of us meet at the same spot."

As is true with rock or mountain climbing, danger is inherent in ice climbing. Falling ice and the chance of being cut by the sharp edges of your own equipment during a slide or fall are perils.



UP FOR THE CHALLENGE: Pelletier's favorite ice climbing destinations include The White Fang, in Underwood Canyon in New York's Adirondacks.

"The popularity of the sport is on the rise," says Pelletier, who is retired but works part-time conducting team-building outdoor "challenge" courses for youngsters. "You can't believe how crowded it is on the ice at times. Everyone from teenagers to those in their seventies is out there climbing."

Technological advances have improved the experience. "The evolution of ice screws and the quality of them has been a revolution for the sport," he says. "They are engineered to be extremely sharp, lightweight, and rapidly screw into the ice. They come in different lengths and provide good fall protection in solid ice."

For more information about ice climbing and places to climb, visit web sites such as www.neice.com. Pelletier recommends that those interested in learning proper ice climbing skills seek out a well-qualified guide, several of whom are based in Connecticut (for starters, check out www.ascentclimbing.net, www.raggedmountainguides.com and www.verticalrealms.com). 📍

John Torsiello, of Torrington, is an award-winning golf and sports writer.

Want to get started?

The Connecticut chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club is sponsoring a beginner's ice climbing class in North Conway, New Hampshire, from Jan. 20 to Jan. 22, with instruction by the International Mountain Climbing School. Cost is \$110 for AMC members, \$150 for non-members; climbing gear rental is included, lodging is not. Information at <http://www.ct-amc.org/mountain/MtnListings.shtm>



ALL THE WAY UP: Pelletier sinks his teeth into The White Fang. If the weather cooperates, he'll complete 16 or so climbs throughout the Northeast in winter.

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Quinoco Energy Services: Quietly and Steadily Keeping Us Warm for 139 Years

By Teresa M. Pelham



While many of us have embraced the ease of electronic billing, a certain segment of society prefers to pay bills in person, sometimes with cash. To accommodate these folks, George Quinion had a drive-through window built to receive payments at his oil company's Bristol headquarters. Even into his 90s, Quinion could be found sitting at the window, building personal relationships with the members of the community.

Quinion passed away in 1979, and the window is no longer there, but customers do come in to pay, to chat, and to see a friendly face. It's that personal connection between employees and customers that has made

Quinoco Energy Services a fixture in Farmington, Bristol, and Torrington and their surrounding communities.

Quinion, whose working-man-in-flannel portrait hangs in the lobby, founded Quinion Coal and Trucking on North Main Street in Bristol in 1877. Ulysses S. Grant was President. The company hauled heavy equipment with horses, delivered coal, and hauled paper from railcars to The Bristol Press.

When current owner Don Phillips first began working for the company in 1976, he was a 19-year-old technician, doing repairs and installations. Phillips, along with Quinion's grandson Brett Quinion, who was also starting out at the company, would pick up their boss at his home in Bristol and drive to work together every day.

Brett Quinion took over the business after his grandfather's death in 1979, and the company name changed shortly thereafter to Quinoco. In 2002, after moving his way up through the ranks, Phillips bought the company

from Quinion. In addition to oil delivery, which began in the early 1900s, Quinoco added

heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) to its list of services, acquired Farmington-based Cadwell, and built a propane terminal in Farmington.

These days, Quinoco has 30 employees, 30 oil and service trucks, a storage capacity of a half million gallons of oil, 7,500 customers in 20 towns, and a strong commitment to the community. A framed photo of a throng of Little Leaguers wearing Quinoco jerseys hangs in the home office.

"We've been sponsoring the team for what - 25 years?" says Phillips. "We're very civic-minded. We have a reputation to live up to and I think we do a pretty good job of that." The company also donates to the Lupus Foundation of America, the Multiple Sclerosis Foundation, and Relay for Life.

The majority of Quinoco's employees have stayed with the company for their entire careers, with the average employee working there for more than 20 years. Thousands of customers have stayed with Quinoco for decades.

"Businesses like ours are kind of rare," Phillips says. "Once people get a taste of what our customer service is like they stay with us. There's a real person answering the phone - a person you know."

Teresa M. Pelham is a writer living in Farmington, and is a frequent contributor to Seasons. She is the author of three books, including two written about her little brown rescue dogs. Contact Teresa at tpelham@comcast.net.





LET'S MEET AT THE *Bistro*

Seabury is excited to unveil our beautiful new bistro.

The chef-created menu – featuring à la carte choices, gluten-free and vegetarian options, made-to-order specialties, homemade desserts and pizza fresh from the oven – has been designed to cater to our residents' eclectic tastes. The panoramic mountain view, floor-to-ceiling windows and dual fireplace create a cozy environment for residents to enjoy a leisurely lunch, entertain family and visitors or relax with the paper and a cup of coffee.

Construction is underway on the next two phases of Seabury's expansion, including 68 new independent living residences scheduled to open in the Fall of 2017. We are now accepting applications for residence from adults 50 and over. **Learn more about how to reserve your future home at our monthly informational sessions on every 1st Thursday at 1:30pm and every 3rd Wednesday at 10:30am. Call (860) 243-6081 or (860) 243-4033 for reservations or e-mail info@seaburylife.org.**



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Vinyl Revolution

Seasons talks with area spin doctors about getting their grooves back

It's easy to wax rhapsodic about vinyl. When you drop a needle into a groove, it elicits pops and hisses. As the platter spins, music recorded decades ago spills from a pair of well-worn speakers. Streaming an MP3 is like getting a text message: cold and remote. But playing your favorite record is intimate; it's having a conversation with a good friend.

Pulling out a record connects music and listener. The ritual taps into the collective unconscious shared by generations of Americans. There's even a unique smell to new vinyl.

Moving into a new apartment once meant carrying milk crates full of your favorite albums. Instead of watching music videos, which launched with MTV in 1981, listeners used to admire beautiful album artwork and pore over detailed liner notes.

Today, a trip to Barnes & Noble might be shocking to those who still have old vinyl in their basements. New record sections are cropping up in stores. Record sales are at a 28-year-high, according to several business magazines.

There's a vinyl revolution going on, and it's not just for audiophiles and hipsters anymore. Whether you're into jazz, classic rock, or indie bands, the allure of listening to records is attracting more fans. A passion for records is bringing customers back to music stores in droves, and inspiring us once again to find space in our living rooms for a turntable.

Medium Fidelity

Modern listeners, streaming music on their iPhones, may be baffled about why anyone would prefer to hear vintage vinyl. But a unique, and perhaps undefinable, quality is prompting people to return to records, both new and used, in the digital age of CDs and MP3s.

"It's the sound, which I understand is not for everybody," says Dan Curland, owner of Mystic Disc, on Steamboat Wharf in Mystic. He operates a funky, eclectic shop featuring

more than 50 feet of record bins, catering to all styles of music. He continues, "Not everyone has a high-end turntable, but it's about the sound. If the music was recorded analog, then I recommend buying the record. It's going to sound better on a turntable."

Sound is only part of the appeal. "This is an 'old-time' way of listening to music. We always want to go 'back to the garden' as we said in the '60s," says Curland, quoting from the Crosby, Stills Nash & Young version of Joni Mitchell's "Woodstock." "But half of my customers are under the age of 25. They haven't seen album art like this before. So there's that side of it. Whether they pick up a Charles Mingus or Neil Young album, they are always amazed at the artwork." He adds, "Now I sell more Frank Sinatra albums to 14-year-old kids than anyone else. It's just cool to have a record player."

Curland says the number one seller of new vinyl nationwide is the millennial-focused clothing store Urban Outfitters. Mystic Disc, which opened in 1983, nearly closed in 2006 due to waning interest in physical media. A decade ago, fewer CDs were being sold, and the resurgence in records had yet to arrive.

"We got rid of all the CDs," he says. "In the 1990s CDs took over like weeds in a pond, but in 2006 I almost closed. A few years later, I sold my house to help the store survive. We were fortunate that business started to pick up three to four years ago. Since then, interest in vinyl is up at least a hundred percent. Foot traffic is up. People are curious about records again."

He says price is another attractive element of record collecting. "You can come in my store and find good condition LPs [long play vinyl records] starting at three dollars and up," he says. "We guarantee they don't have defects. We have a listening station for you to preview the music. On a rainy weekend, coming here is a social thing."

Streaming an MP3
is like getting a text
message: cold and remote.
But playing your favorite
record is intimate; it's
having a conversation
with a good friend.

RECORD NUMBERS: Hearing music, from artists including Mumford & Sons, on an iDevice often influences fans to seek out the vinyl version for a richer sound. The Telegraph, in New London, pictured here, is one such place to do just that.

No Jacket Required

New London's record retailer The Telegraph is a relative newcomer to the vinyl revival, riding the wave during the past six years. Owner Rich Martin is uniquely positioned for this return-to-records trend.

"We've seen growth every year since opening," Martin says. Although getting music online is undeniably the elephant in the room, Martin says technology opens the doors for listeners who may then choose to experience their favorite songs in physical form. "People are streaming a lot, which is a means of discovery for them," he explains. "They're hearing new and old acts online, then coming into the shop asking about them."

The Telegraph has no particular musical focus, instead preferring to stock almost every genre. "Right now, in new vinyl there's a big emphasis on indie rock," Martin says. "For used records, we have a large selection of jazz, reggae, and punk. We try to have a little bit of everything."

Martin also runs an adjunct business called Telegraph Recording Company, which produces indie rock and punk music on vinyl and other mediums. It was the catalyst for opening the record shop in 2010. He says the longevity of the medium also helps sell records. "Vinyl can last for the ages," he says. "I've got vinyl that's 60 years old and can still play, unlike CDs from a few years back."

Martin adds that even the act of switching songs on an album is indicative that vinyl fans want a tangible connection. "You have to find the song you want to hear. You have to get up and change it," he says of lifting the needle off the record.

"This is a conscious choice to be engaged in the music."

A Love Supreme

The most venerable place to buy vinyl in Connecticut is Integrity 'n Music, a Wethersfield institution for almost half a century. The shop is truly a hidden gem. Although it disappeared from direct view along the Silas Deane Highway, the record store survives in back of its former location.

It's tucked away unceremoniously behind a beauty salon and a needleworks shop. Only a weathered wood sign tells record aficionados they have arrived. A black-and-white photo collage in the foyer shows you exactly what to expect. It's a "who's who" of performers specializing in the style Integrity is known best for: jazz.

"I first opened shop in 1972," says owner Ed Krech. "We've been down here since 2001, and we were upstairs for 25 years." The store mascot is an English Sheepdog. His current canine is named "Satchmo," the nickname of famed trumpeter Louis Armstrong. On any given Saturday, a current of customers courses through the record bins, exiting the store with stacks of vintage vinyl.

Krech hasn't seen a renewed interest in records because his customers' passion for them never waned. "I've been selling vinyl for 44 years," he says. "I can't really say there's been a resurgence here because there's always been an interest for jazz and blues records. As soon as I get a big bunch in, they're gone. I have deejays coming in from New York City to buy from me. I've bought collections of five thousand and six thousand pieces and sold most of it within a couple weeks."



GET YOUR GROOVE ON: Purchasing vinyl is "The nicest thing you can do for your stylus – and your ears," says the cover of a reissue of a Charles Mingus album, available at Wethersfield's Integrity 'n Music.

INTEGRITY & N MUSIC



MEET THE MASTER: Ed Krech, of Integrity 'n Music, in Wethersfield, has been selling vinyl for 44 years. "I can't really say there's been a resurgence here because there's always been an interest in jazz and blues records," he says. "As soon as I get a big bunch in, they're gone."



PURPLE HAZE: Black lights set the mood at The Telegraph, one of the newer vinyl shops on the Shoreline. It opened in New London six years ago.

The records at Integrity, while known for jazz, can run the gamut. Used classic rock records, such as those by The Who, typically sell for just 99 cents. Rock and pop records from the 1980s by artists like Def Leppard and Adam Ant are relegated to the 50-cent bin. Not far away sit much more expensive, and brand new, reissues of European jazz records that can fetch as much as \$30 each. Krech is a big fan of New Orleans jazz. Lately, he's noticed younger fans of genres other than jazz. "Kids are coming in to buy the older rock and R&B albums," he says. "The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, and Chicago are popular."

Buying records is not just nostalgia for bygone days. There's a reason why Facebook recently rolled out a video celebrating online "friendships" featuring the image of an old turntable:

We exist in an analog world that digital media can only try to approximate.

A re-issue of a Charles Mingus album on display at Integrity sums it up. The album proclaims on the cover that purchasing vinyl is "The nicest thing you can do for your stylus – and your ears." A lot of Krech's customers agree. One customer remarks, while holding a tower of records at the check-out counter, that this is how music is meant to be heard.

Looking over the old wooden bins full of American music history, Krech shares what he believes to be the siren song of his shop.

"I love good music," he says. "Good music is good, whether it's on vinyl, cassette, or CD. Other people say they can hear a difference, and that may be true. What I'm sure of is that I



know guys who have collections of 10,000 records. They still come in here looking for more.”

Mike Briotta is a freelance writer who grew up with such vinyl masterpieces as the “Grease” soundtrack and The Muppets Christmas album with John Denver. He moved on to Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” and “Pyromania” by Def Leppard. His musical tastes have evolved very slightly since then. He enjoys listening to records on his father’s old Technics turntable.

Tony Reynolds, a “storyteller with a lens,” creates a personal vision script with inquisitive and open eyes. See more at www.pilgrimphotos.smugmug.com

TURNTABLE TECH

Here are a few tips for buying a turntable from the owners of area record shops.

Dan Curland, Mystic Disc, Mystic:

“I tell people to stay away from the [inexpensive] brands,” says Curland. “They sell turntables that are self-contained or plug into your computer. The problem is, they are cheaply made. The tone arm will eventually stop tracking your record.”

He suggests buying a record player from the company U-Turn, located in Boston. “If you buy from them, you’ll get a great entry-level turntable,” he says. “You can pick one up for \$170-\$180. You’ll still need to get an amp for about \$80. It must have a phono input to power the turntable motor.”

For repairs, Curland refers all his customers to an area repairman who is schooled in replacing needles, tone arms and other moving parts. “You can walk out of my store with a great system for around \$250,” he says. “It’s better to spend about that much, if you plan on keeping the system long term. Don’t go to Kohl’s or Target. Buy the system that will last you a lifetime.”

Rich Martin, The Telegraph, New London:

Martin suggests home stereo gear made by Audio Technica, which he sells in his store.

“The LP60 is a nice entry-level machine,” says Martin. “It can cost between \$125 and \$175 and it’s made with quality components. It is built to last longer than some of the cheaper brands out there.” He suggests partnering it with powered speakers or a receiver and speakers. The speakers he suggests are Audio Engine A2 Plus, which run about \$250 for the pair. “For a \$300-\$500 total investment, this setup will last a lifetime of use,” he says. “It’s much better than replacing everything in a few years.”

He says that retro setups are admittedly much bigger and pricier than listening to music on your phone. However, the rewards are worth it. “A turntable, receiver, and speakers can take up a lot of real estate,” Martin says. “But this is the best sound you’re going to get.”

Ed Krech, Integrity ‘n Music, Wethersfield:

Krech says he’s not that into the technical side of listening to vinyl, and is not that picky when it comes to stereo setups. His shop turntable and speakers were pieced together throughout the years. Krech frequently spins LPs in the shop. He suggests that home stereo aficionados visit The Stereo Shop on Farmington Avenue in Hartford for turntable repairs and home setup recommendations.

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WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING

Seasons dispatched photographer Todd Fairchild to Torrington to document scenes and people the majority of us never see because we're dreaming. Here's who's up in the wee hours and why

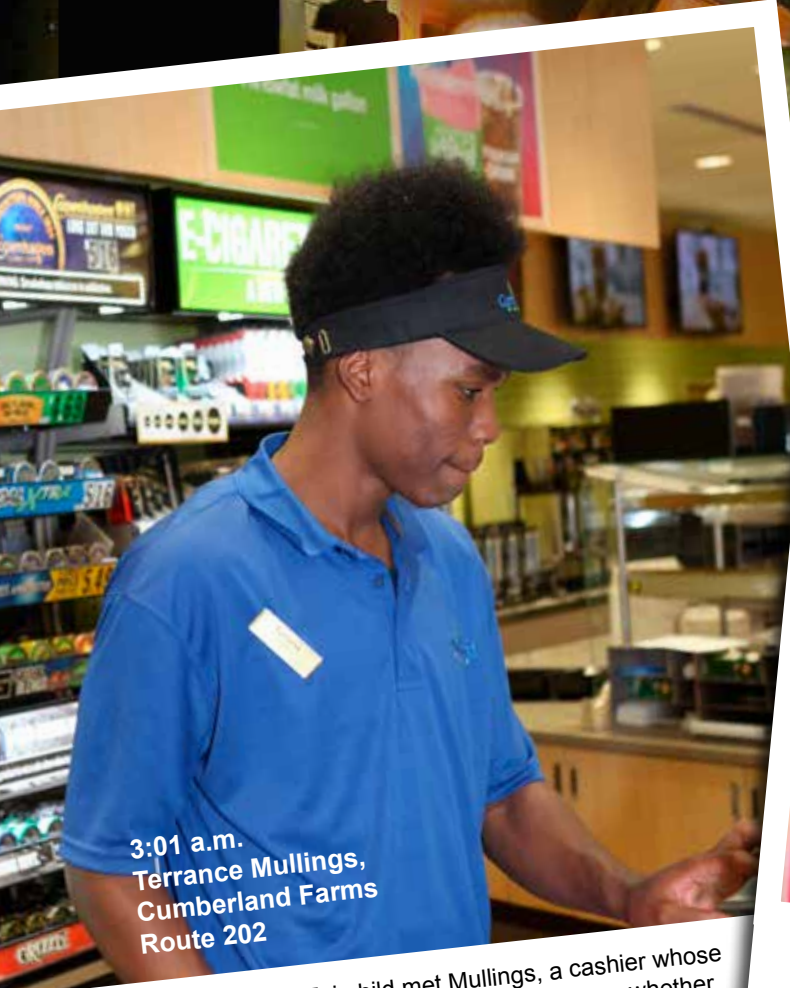


UP ALL NIGHT: At 4:45 a.m., award-winning photographer Todd Fairchild toasts to the night-owl citizenry of Torrington, at the city's Twin Colony Diner.

On average, folks in the Northwest Hills are in bed, lights out, by 11:30 and get seven hours of sleep, according to Jawbone, an audio company that documented sleep patterns across the country. But in our 24/7 culture, our world never fully shuts down. Even in the thickest part of the night – in that wedge of time after the bars close and before yoga practitioners unfurl their mats and greet the day with a downward dog – the hills are alive. As many of us, particularly those who don't work third shift, are sound asleep between 1 a.m. to 4 a.m., we

dispatched photographer Todd Fairchild to document who's up then and why. The result is a series of portraits taken in Torrington that capture the industry, work ethic and good humor of the night-owl citizenry who keep the city sated, secure and caffeinated while the bulk of us are sleeping.

"My overall impression was working in the middle of the night isn't unusual for them," says Fairchild, whose previous Seasons photo essay, "Strangers Collide," won an award from the Connecticut chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists. "It's life. It's what they do. They sleep from 9 a.m.



3:01 a.m.
Terrance Mullings,
Cumberland Farms
Route 202

At Cumberland Farms, Fairchild met Mullings, a cashier whose industrious, cordial nature endears him to customers, whether they've stopped by for coffee, gas, or to use the restroom. "That was our first stop, and I made my pitch," says Fairchild. "I said, 'This is probably the craziest request you'll get all night,' and I told him about the idea behind the project. He agreed to participate, and I was relieved to get off to a good start."



3:30 a.m.
Lashanda Davis,
McDonald's drive-thru,
Main Street


The only traffic jam Fairchild encountered during the night was at McDonald's, where several customers waited in the drive-thru line. After the cars had left, Fairchild walked up to the window, camera in hand. "Lashanda was super friendly and a super early-morning person," he says. "She liked the idea of showing readers that there's a whole other world that goes on in the middle of the night."

to 4 p.m. and then they start their day.”

While working the late shift for this *Seasons* story, Fairchild came to appreciate the beauty and freedom of the deepest part of the night. “There’s no traffic at all,” Fairchild says. “Intersections that are usually busy, I could go right through them.” When he and his wife, Mary-Beth, who accompanied him on assignment, stopped at a local diner for breakfast, there wasn’t a wait.

On the following pages, Fairchild shares what he encountered when he drove into Torrington on Route 202

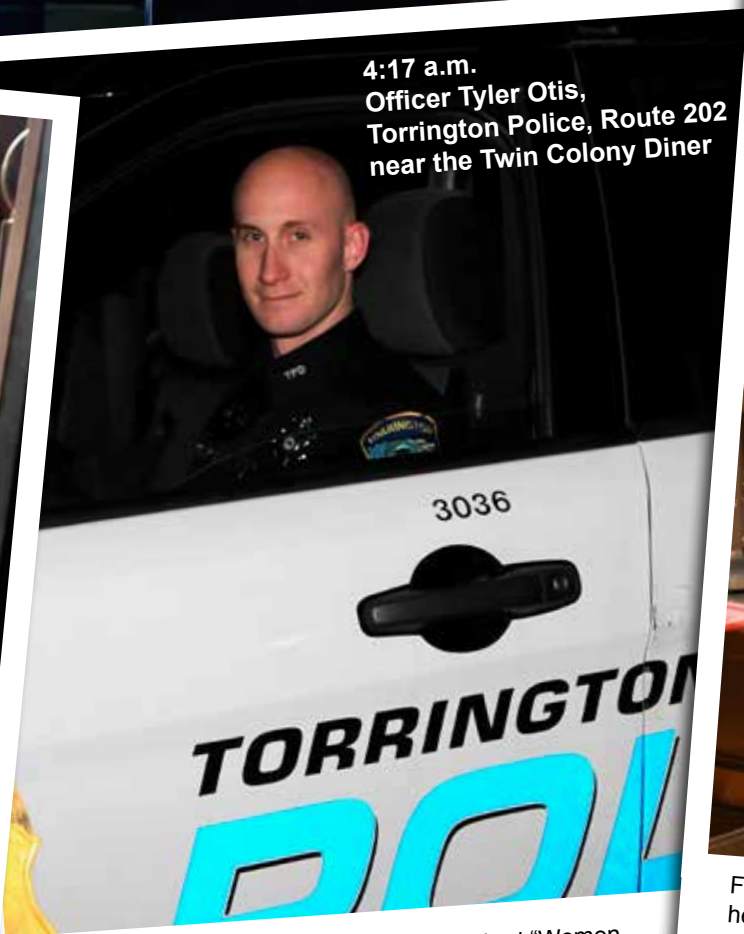
in mid-October. “My strategy was, if anything has lights on, anything looks open, I’m going in,” says Fairchild.

Come along with him for the ride. 

Todd Fairchild, of West Hartford, is a longtime contributor to Seasons. For more about Todd, go to shutterbugct.com.

Deborah Geigis Berry is the editorial director of Seasons Magazines.

4:17 a.m.
Officer Tyler Otis,
Torrington Police, Route 202
near the Twin Colony Diner



Last year for *Seasons*, Fairchild photographed “Women in Blue,” a story about policewomen in Greater Hartford. When Fairchild saw a police cruiser pull into a parking lot across from the Twin Colony, he seized the opportunity. “His car lights were off,” says Fairchild. “I approached the vehicle very slowly and waved.” After Fairchild explained the premise of “While You Were Sleeping” to Otis, the officer consented to have his photo taken. “He was very agreeable. We chatted it up a bit. I told him about the lady cops story I did for *Seasons*, and I thanked him for his service.”



4:34 a.m.
Thomas Zogas
the Twin Colony Diner
417 East Elm Street
Torrington

Fairchild’s wife, Mary-Beth, agreed to accompany him on assignment if he treated her to breakfast at the Twin Colony, with its robust menu of comfort food. The diner’s skeleton crew included a chef, host and Zogas, who waited on the couple. “The only other customers were a couple picking up take-out,” says Fairchild. The Fairchilds tried to brighten Zogas’s shift by leaving a big tip.



Simsbury's Town Jeweler, Bill Selig

Committed to Artistry and Giving Back to the Community



Written by Theresa Anzaldúa

Growing up in Windsor, during the turbulent '60s, Bill Selig explored politics, environmentalism and various forms of art. When he learned to make jewelry in his early 20s he instantly fell in love with the craft. A fortunate man, Selig has been able to make a profession of his passion, and for the past 40 years he has owned and operated Bill Selig Jewelers. Carrying exquisite diamonds, emeralds, and other precious and semiprecious jewels, the store, at 712 Hopmeadow Street in Simsbury, is a local institution. "We reflect what's needed in a nice town," Selig says. "We enjoy helping a family choose a college graduation gift and then

that child comes to us for wedding rings. We love seeing people come in for the major events in their lives."

Store manager Annette DiClemente, who has worked with Selig since her now grown twin sons were in kindergarten, enjoys selling baptism gifts to parents and then watching their kids grow up. Recently, the 4-year-old daughter of clients broke a plastic "princess" necklace and asked to go to the jewelers to have it fixed. DiClemente was delighted to be able to help her. "We're the family jeweler," she says.

In addition to running the traditional jewelry shop, Selig is closely involved in a variety of local activities. Just over a year ago, he succeeded in combining his interests in art, jewelry and community by restoring part of a nationally recognized

SIMSBURY'S TOWN JEWELER, BILL SELIG

historic building and transforming it into a combination art gallery, gathering space and gift shop called The Studio & Gallery. The Studio is located in the sun-drenched garden room of the Robert and Julia Darling House, a twenty-five room mansion built in 1927, located just a couple hundred feet from the jewelry store in the heart of Simsbury.

The Studio is a beautiful place to shop for high-quality, curated gifts, art, decorative items and unique jewelry. Selig handpicks the artists whose work is featured. The newest artist to team up with The Studio is jewelry designer Jane Taylor. "Jane uses gemstones as her paint strokes," Selig says. "She has a wonderful use of color and she chooses only the best quality and cut of stones, focusing on multi-colored sapphires among many other beautiful gemstones." Selig is excited to be collaborating with Taylor. "Designing jewelry with other artists has always been a love of mine," he says. In addition to jewelry, The Studio features glass, ceramics, metal sculpture, paintings and drawings by artists such as Peter Greenwood, Vicente Garcia, Jen Violette, Naomi, and Elyse Ryan.

The Studio is also the perfect place to pick up a special hostess gift or stocking stuffer. "We need a store like this. This is Main Street shopping, where you can see and feel special, eclectic pieces and have them beautifully gift-wrapped," explains Ellyn Ziplow, the manager for The Studio. Ziplow enjoys describing how she and Selig choose each item in the store – the throw blankets from Great Britain, the Louis Sherry chocolates, the Sugarfina champagne gummy bears (Selig's favorite), and the list goes on. Prices range widely, starting at \$5 for fossilized sharks teeth, which kids really get a kick out of, says Selig.

Selig's commitment to Simsbury was the inspiration for The Studio. "We restored a piece of Simsbury history," explains Selig, who lives in town with his wife, Sandy, and their dog, George. Restoring the garden room took four months, including two months just on the floor, and the place sparkles. It is a beautiful spot to shop and to gather. Selig and his team host gatherings



for groups such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Simsbury Garden Club. A Jane Taylor trunk show is scheduled for early December.

Some of Selig's offerings directly benefit local causes. For instance, artist Debbie Leonard crafted a fern-shaped pendant for The Studio, and for each sale the store Selig donates \$25 to the Simsbury Land Trust. The Studio carries other, similar items, such as a river-shaped pendant to benefit the Farmington River Watershed Association and the Flower Bridge pendant for the Old Drake Hill Flower Bridge foundation. In addition to helping the community, these items make wonderful, thoughtful gifts, says Ziplow.

Selig believes his commitment to giving back stems from his early life experiences, and that side of him is often apparent. Selig says jewelry is "the original recycled material." "There's a mystery to precious metals," he explains. "The same metals have been around for centuries, bought, sold and traded, melted together. You don't know what you're wearing. You could be wearing a part of Cleopatra's ring." In addition to custom jewelry making, Selig enjoys repurposing jewelry, especially heirloom and vintage items. "We can take your grandmother's cocktail ring, something you might not wear, and work with you to turn it into a piece you can enjoy every day, so you can carry your memories with you," Selig says. The Studio – a lovely, artistic and inspiring spot – is the perfect place to meet with artist Bill Selig to do just that.

Theresa Anzaldúa, of Farmington, is an award-winning writer and author of We Had a Job to Do: A Basic History of World War II Through the Eyes of Those Who Served. Purchase the book at harvard.com or amazon.com. For more about Theresa, go to www.theresaanzaldua.com.

THE PERFECT GIFT: Shoppers can visit two premiere shopping destinations located a few hundred feet from each other, Bill Selig Jewelers, a Simsbury institution for 38 years, and The Studio, in the Robert and Julia Darling House, featuring hand-crafted jewelry, decorative items, artwork, high-end chocolate and custom gift-wrapping.



STRAIGHT FROM THE NORTH POLE: George McCleary, 62, of Thomaston, estimates he makes up to \$10,000 and more annually from Santa appearances between Thanksgiving and Christmas. He's portrayed Santa since 1972.

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Written by **Matthew Broderick**

Photography by **Amber Jones Photography**

The Trick to Being Saint Nick

Fielding difficult requests (such as a wish for divorced parents to reunite) dealing with crying toddlers, and attending to grooming matters, such as beard bleaching, are realities for the jolly gents who play Santa



WELL-SUITED FOR THE JOB: Before he became Santa, Charles Allen, 87, was a sergeant on the Hartford Police force, a florist and a teen counselor. "Being Santa is the best thing that ever happened to me," says Allen, of Rocky Hill.



retired sergeant from the Hartford police force, Charles Allen, was not looking for a new job. But 10 years ago while visiting Fantasia of Lights in Hartford's Goodwin Park with his family, Allen, then age 77, got a job offer from an unlikely source: Santa Claus.

"There was a Santa at the entrance greeting everyone," recalls the white-bearded Allen, of Rocky Hill. "He saw me and came over to our car and mentioned quietly that he had more [Santa] business than he could handle if I was interested."

Intrigued, Allen, who had never considered being Santa as a business, did some online research and found himself enrolling in a web-based Santa training program.

Allen is one of an estimated 70,000 people across America who will don the red suit this holiday season at shopping malls, parades, and holiday parties. Being the man in red can generate some significant green, according to New Hampshire's Dan Greenleaf, 65, a co-founder of the New England Santa Society, a volunteer-based organization designed to help train aspiring Kringles across the northeast. "In Connecticut, a Santa with some training can earn well over \$150 an hour," says Greenleaf, who typically makes more than 50 appearances during the holiday season. "In the Boston area, it's closer to \$250 an hour."

George McCleary, 62, of Thomaston, has played the role of Santa more than 600 times since 1972. He estimates he can earn more than \$10,000 annually, between Thanksgiving and Christmas, from 50 clients, including Eversource Electric, Microsoft, New England Sports Center and Bass Pro Shops. Last year, he booked more than 70 events. Like many would-be Santas, McCleary sees the financial upside of becoming Saint Nick as secondary to the joy he experiences. "There is a magical connection between Santa and a child," McCleary says.

Sometimes that magic is tested. "The hardest,

most challenging situation I ever had [as Santa] was going with Mrs. Claus to Newtown, three days after the [Sandy Hook] school shootings," McCleary says. The children, he recalls, were understandably subdued, but he followed his normal routine. The first child he saw, McCleary says, wanted nothing. "The next boy, when I asked what we wanted, said a football," McCleary recounts. "I reached into my bag, grabbed a present, and as luck would have it, it was a football." The child smiled.

The difficult requests that can reach Santa's ear – a wish for divorced parents to get back together, or for the return of a deceased relative, or for a parent on a tour of duty to come home – require finesse. "You never want to promise something to a child you can't deliver," McCleary says. "I've been fortunate to attend trainings that feature table discussions and practical tips on how to address sensitive topics and accommodate children with special needs."

Groups like the New England Santa Society and the Connecticut Society of Santas conduct educational workshops throughout the year, most heavily in autumn. "We have trainings for both novices and more seasoned Santas," Greenleaf says. For newcomers, training covers the basics – learning the history of Santa Claus, grooming tips, dealing with difficult children, and finding Santa jobs. Santas with more experience under their wide black belts might learn magic tricks or balloon crafts to add a new twist to their events.

For many toddlers, visiting Saint Nick can be a scary experience and a trying one for an unprepared Santa. Greenleaf says he trains his students, when dealing with a frightened child, to connect with parents first. "Once you get the seal of approval from mom or dad, the child usually opens up," Greenleaf says. "Sometimes it takes a prop like a book, toy or puppet; there are a lot of approaches we teach."

Ed Dorsett, 74, of Morris, was one of nearly 20 Santas trained in the state last year by the Connecticut Society of Santas. He was inspired to try his hand at being Santa when strangers commented on his physical similarities to Mr. Kringle. In his first year, he booked more than



“One girl presented me with two lists: a personal one and one for the underprivileged and homeless; she chose to talk about the second one,” Ed Dorsett says. “I told her how pleased that made me.”

HIGH DEMAND: Ed Dorsett, 74, of Morris, booked more than 25 appearances last year, his first season portraying Santa.

25 appearances, including one at Foxwoods Resort Casino. Dorsett learned it’s not always Santa who teaches the meaning of Christmas. “One girl presented me with two lists: a personal one and one for the underprivileged and homeless; she chose to talk about the second one,” he says. “I told her how pleased that made me.”

Greenleaf says a big part of connecting with children is building trust. “You need to have a love of children and accept them where they are [in that moment] in a way that is believable,” he says. It’s also important, he cautions, to authentically look the part. A good quality suit, boots, belt and buckle, and, in some cases, beard-bleaching, are essentials. “It can cost a couple thousand dollars just to get the basics,” Greenleaf says. “And that doesn’t include things like business cards, background checks and insurance.” (Yes, even Saint Nick needs liability coverage.)

While annual costs can run well into the upper hundreds of dollars between training classes and grooming, the market demand for Santa during the holiday season outpaces the supply. That’s made it easier, even for novice Santas, to cash in. “I get booking requests earlier each year,” says Greenleaf,

who uses online Santa sites and social media to generate business leads. “Many clients started to call this past March and April for events this December.”

During the holidays, one of the biggest challenges for local Santas is fitting in all their appearances. Typically, the weekends – which can provide \$2,000 in income, according to Greenleaf – book quickly. “I try to reserve mid-week events for places like schools or nursing homes,” he says, noting he’s appeared in parades, at children’s hospitals, stores and tree lighting ceremonies during his nine years in Santa’s shoes.

And it’s not just children, Greenleaf’s found, that rejoice when he’s in character. “When I interact with the parents or the elderly I can see [on their faces] the childhood memories [of Santa] coming back,” he says. “It’s not just a role you play; there’s a much more important connection for people.”

Charles Allen, now 87 and a decade into his post-retirement career as Santa, agrees. “I decided when I started [as Santa] that I wanted to do more than ‘meet and greets’, he says. “Because being Santa provided a greater power of influence with children.”

He developed a program called Life Experiences and uses

his time as Santa to teach children tolerance, respect and the importance of a positive attitude. “The first rule I teach is the golden rule – treat others as you want to be treated,” he explains. “When I tell kids how proud of them when they know that rule, their ego goes through the ceiling.”

The power and satisfaction Allen feels being Santa surpasses anything he experienced in his previous careers. In addition to being a police officer, he’s been a teen counselor, florist, wedding videographer and wedding consultant. “Being Santa is the best thing that ever happened to me,” he says. “The happiest people are those that make others happy.”

This season, many Santas across Connecticut will earn a sleigh’s worth of money at malls, parades and holiday parties across the state, but for many, like Charles Allen, that will never be their primary motivation. “As Santa, when you look into the eyes of a child, you see their true love,” he says, “because you [as Santa] are their hero.” ❧

Matthew Broderick is a freelance writer who lives in Simsbury with his three children.

Photographer Amber Jones, of Avon, is a frequent contributor to Seasons and owns Studio Pura in West Hartford. For more about Amber, visit amberjones.com.



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SUITING UP

If you’re inspired to launch a career as Santa, consider these qualifications, courtesy of Dan Greenleaf, co-founder of the New England Santa Society, a volunteer-based organization that helps train aspiring Kringles.

OPENNESS: Many think Santa needs a big round jelly belly to don the red suit. But Santa comes in all shapes and sizes. What he can never have too much of is heart – a boundless spirit of love, giving and joy. His spirit should spark joy in everyone regardless of their age.

IMAGINATION: For optimum connection, Santa needs to see the world from a child’s perspective. Whimsy, mischievousness, innocence, optimism, playfulness, acceptance and wonder are important qualities.

POSITIVE ENERGY: Santa must always be a jolly old elf even when fatigue, boredom or frustration kicks in.

VERSATILITY: The best Santas are multitasked. Santa could be called on to read a story to toddlers, lead a rendition of “Jingle Bells,” help assemble a new toy, visit a child in the hospital, help decorate Christmas cookies, or greet thousands along a parade route.

INCLUSIVENESS: Santa needs to be able to read and respond appropriately to people of all ages and types, from hesitant youngsters and rowdy teenagers to office workers and senior citizens. When things don’t go as planned or conflict occurs, Santa is the one who needs to maintain order and stability.

AUTHENTICITY: One must think as Santa, answer questions as Santa, interact as Santa and present oneself as the real Santa. Allowing children (and adults) to interact with the real Santa Claus is the number one priority.

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Put grandma's mulled cider recipe on hold and shake up a real-deal cocktail with complex flavors and natural garnishes that make winter something to celebrate

Winter cocktails should warm your soul. I'm talking that sit-in-front-of-a-fire-after-a-long-day-of-snowboarding-and-pour-a-drink-that-makes-your-insides-burn kind of warm. That come-in-after-a-day-of-shoveling-snow-and-light-a-little-fire-inside-you kind of warm. Thankfully, liquors like bourbon, whiskey, rum and dark tequila provide the antidote to bitter temperatures.

In my search for the ultimate winter cocktails, I asked the bar managers at some of my favorite restaurants around the state to weigh in. They provided recipes for cocktails that are the real deal through and through. Don't shy away from ice just because it's winter; the ingredients in these new classics will keep you toasty. 

Alycia Chrosniak is the founder of CT Eats Out, your guide to the best eats in the state. For more information, visit cteatsout.com.



MAPLE RUSH: Poured over ice, this blend of rye whiskey, dry Madeira and maple syrup warms the soul.



DRUNKEN APPLE: A cinnamon stick and apple garnish give this tequila-based beverage a playful edge.

DRUNKEN APPLE COCKTAIL

Grants Restaurant by Taylor Hyde

Thanks to apples and cinnamon, this cocktail is a great transition drink from fall to winter

Ingredients:

- 1½ ounce tequila
- ½ ounce agave
- ½ ounce fresh-squeezed lime juice
- ¾ ounce grapefruit juice
- 1¾ ounce apple juice
- ½ ounce cinnamon syrup, recipe follows
- ½ ounce simple syrup

Cinnamon Syrup:

- 20 cinnamon sticks
- 2 cups of water

Instructions:**For cinnamon syrup:**

Bring 2 cups of water to a boil.
Add cinnamon sticks and take off heat.
Let steep overnight like tea.
Remove cinnamon sticks.

For cocktail:

Place all ingredients in a shaker and shake over ice.
Pour into a glass and garnish with a cinnamon stick and apple slice.

For information about Grants, in West Hartford, go to www.billygrant.com

At press time, Seasons learned Taylor Hyde is no longer at Grants. We wish to thank her for the recipe.

Perfect Pairings

COLD-WEATHER CLASSICS

The change in temperature is a good indicator that it's time to put away lighter, fruitier summer cocktails and indulge in elixirs that are more complex and substantial. Scott Clark, of Liquor Depot, shares his expertise on the liquors, techniques and tips that can enhance winter celebrations.

SC: Which spirits get folks into the holiday spirit?

SC: One tried and true way to welcome in the holidays (and your guests) is to whip up a fresh batch of eggnog. Numerous recipes abound – pick your favorite, using brandy, bourbon or rum.

A dash of Irish whiskey and a smidge of brown sugar makes for a great post-meal libation.

SC: What are ideal wines for parties?

SC: The festive mood of the holidays makes it the ideal time for a little bubbly. Whether you're a fan of traditional French cuvees, trendy Italian Proseccos, or a delicious Spanish Cava, popping a cork signals it's time to celebrate.

SC: Any tips for popping corks?

SC: When opening any bottle of sparkling wine, carefully remove the foil and metal cage, hold the bottle at a slight angle with one hand firmly around the cork, and slowly twist the bottle back and forth. Twisting the bottle while holding the cork steady allows the cork to loosen slower, and the bottle opens with a much less force. This technique helps prevent the precious liquid inside from spraying all over the place.

SC: What wines make great gifts?

SC: A good age-worthy red wine, such as a cabernet sauvignon from California, Bordeaux from France or Barolo from Italy, are guaranteed to make the recipient smile. A nice bottle of Champagne is always thoughtful. Nothing marks a celebration like the popping of a cork.

For your holiday beverage needs, visit Liquor Depot, in New Britain and West Simsbury, www.liquordepotinc.com



VELVET ROSE

Krust Pizza and Bourbon Bar by Neil Robinson

Perfectly balanced and frothy, this cocktail is perfect after a day on the slopes

Ingredients:

- 1½ ounce Hennessy cognac**
- 1 ounce sour mix**
- ½ ounce Luxardo Maraschino Liqueur**
- ½ ounce Velvet Falernum liqueur**
- 1 egg white**

Instructions:

Pour all ingredients into a shaker and dry shake (no ice in the shaker) for at least 15 seconds until egg whites are incorporated and frothy.
Add ice and shake again for at least 15 seconds.
Pour over ice and garnish with a cherry.

For information about Krust Pizza Bar, in Middletown, go to www.krustpizzabar.com

MAPLE RUSH COCKTAIL

River Tavern Restaurant by Wesley De Sousa Costa

The acidity of the Madeira wine and lemon juice perfectly balance the sweetness of the maple syrup

Ingredients:


- 1 ounce rye whiskey**
- 1 ounce dry Madeira**
- ½ ounce maple syrup**
- ½ ounce lemon juice**

Instructions:

Place all ingredients in a shaker and shake over ice
Pour over ice and garnish with a lemon peel.

For information about River Tavern Restaurant, in Chester, go to rivertavernrestaurant.com





VELVET ROSE: Courtesy of a blended egg white, this après-ski beverage has a frothy top that mimics snowy slopes. Top it with a cherry.

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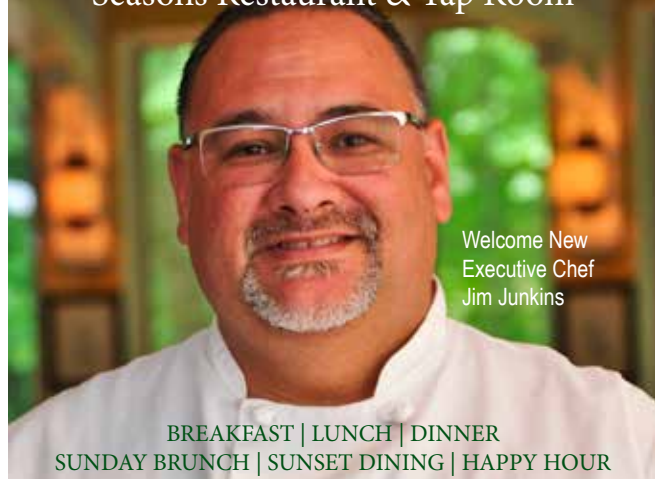
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John Capobianco

When not overseeing projects at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital (CHH), John Capobianco is often cooking Italian food, his specialty, for family and friends. But don't ask him for a recipe. He improvises in the kitchen – a skill he developed as a child, under the tutelage of his grandmother.

Intuition also serves Capobianco well in his position as Vice President for Operations at CHH, where more than 30 years of combined managerial and clinical experience have given him a feel for what makes a hospital run smoothly. The most important ingredients for a successful health care institution? "Flexibility and teamwork," he says.

Capobianco began as a student nurse at CHH in 1985, rising through the ranks until assuming the post of Vice President of Operations in 2012. The 53-year-old administrator is now responsible for all clinical care and operations at the 109-bed hospital. In the three decades since he joined the CHH staff, Capobianco has seen the institution evolve from a primarily inpatient hospital, with 75 percent of patients occupying hospital beds, to a predominantly outpatient one, with outposts throughout the community. He is about to help lead the hospital into a partnership with Hartford Healthcare Corporation that he says will expand services and help the small hospital weather the stormy health care climate.

From Student Nurse to Manager

Capobianco earned an associate degree in nursing at Mattatuck Community College in his hometown of Waterbury, and his bachelor's in nursing at Western Connecticut State University in Danbury. His first encounter with CHH was as a student nurse; in fact, he did his first

clinical rotation there. "After I did several rotations at CHH, I really loved the place, and the staff encouraged me to apply for a job," says Capobianco, adding that the people and the sense of community drew him to the institution.

Capobianco started on the night shift as a graduate nurse, while pursuing his bachelor's degree, on the medical-surgical floor, where he had done that first clinical rotation. He was interested in management early on, and so worked toward his master's at Rensselaer in Hartford soon after earning his bachelor's. When his nurse manager decided to switch into another specialty, the staff again urged him to apply for the position. He worked as unit manager from 1998 through 1991, progressed to Director of Nursing Operations, a post he held from 1991 to 1994, and then in 1994 was named Director of Projects and Systems for Patient Operations.

"Smaller, clinically-based projects, like helping to build our clinical information system, eventually led to me branching over and doing some business planning and business development," Capobianco says, explaining his gradual shift from patient care to administrative work. During this period, he helped to build new, off-site outpatient programs, including a behavioral health clinic for children (now known as the Center for Families and Children) and a freestanding urgent care center. As Vice President for Administration, Outpatient Services, and now Patient Care Operations, Capobianco has also planned, developed and financed a freestanding cancer center, opened a satellite diabetes clinic, converted the former Winsted Hospital into a satellite ambulatory care center and off-site emergency department, and overseen a \$28 million renovation of the main hospital building.

VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS:

John Capobianco is responsible for all clinical care and operations at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital.



“I was learning as I was doing it,” says Capobianco, who says he took a project management course along the way to help him stay organized, and relied on the expertise of architects, builders and engineers to guide him in the project work. “I found myself doing the planning of what the clinical programs were going to look like, what kind of services we’d offer, what kind of staff you would need, who your target populations would be.”

Combining Clinical and Managerial Expertise

Even as Capobianco took on more administrative duties, his clinical experience continued to inform the decisions he made. “If in developing an outpatient center or renovating a clinical space, you create an environment that doesn’t work well for patients or staff, it could be a detriment to patient care,” says Capobianco. Thus, when planning such projects, he would consider how patients were going to flow through a space, what amenities staff and patients would require, how to incorporate the use of natural light and outdoor spaces to create places that were more serene than sterile.

“The Cancer Center is a great example, and one of our best projects, because we really paid attention to the environment,” he says. “The use of glass, natural light, patios for patients if they wanted to go outdoors – we even created a meditation garden and a walking trail, not only for patients but also for their families and significant others, so they don’t always have to be confined inside four walls.”

Capobianco admits that now that he is further away from his experiences with patient care, he relies on staff input to help design new projects. “We did something unique with our emergency department renovations,” he says. “We built four rooms that we used as prototypes to have staff try different things – a hands-free faucet using sensors versus one with foot pedals, for example, or doors that swing to the left or the right.” Capobianco says the institution’s goal is to provide doctors and staff with the right tools to offer optimal patient care. “Hopefully, I have an ear that listens to their voice and is maybe more appreciative of that than if I were just a businessperson,” he adds.

Capobianco admits that there are certain things he misses about patient care. “For one, the feedback and gratitude you get from taking care of people and helping people,” he says. “You go into health care because you are drawn to people and you like to help them.” But though

he appreciated nursing individual patients, Capobianco says that as a clinician, he could not have an impact on everyone on the unit, or the floor, or the building at the same time. “I appreciate my role now, because I feel that I can have a larger impact.”

The challenge as an administrator, he says, is trying to balance clinical outcomes and patient experience with financial considerations. “There are financial pressures we are under with health care today, but we have to make sure we stay true to our mission,” says Capobianco. “We have to have enough money to keep the lights on and the doors open, and at the same time give good quality care to patients and have the good outcomes that patients expect.”

The hospital’s affiliation with Hartford Healthcare, which is expected to be finalized by next summer, is likely to benefit CHH both financially and clinically, Capobianco says. He likens being a small hospital to being a little ship out in the ocean. “Being a community hospital, we’ve always been very dependent on volume, and more sensitive to fluctuations in that volume,” he says. “Just as a big wave will jostle a small boat around, whereas on a larger ship, you might not feel that wave as much, our sensitivity margin is very small. A small percentage change in volume can have a large financial impact.”

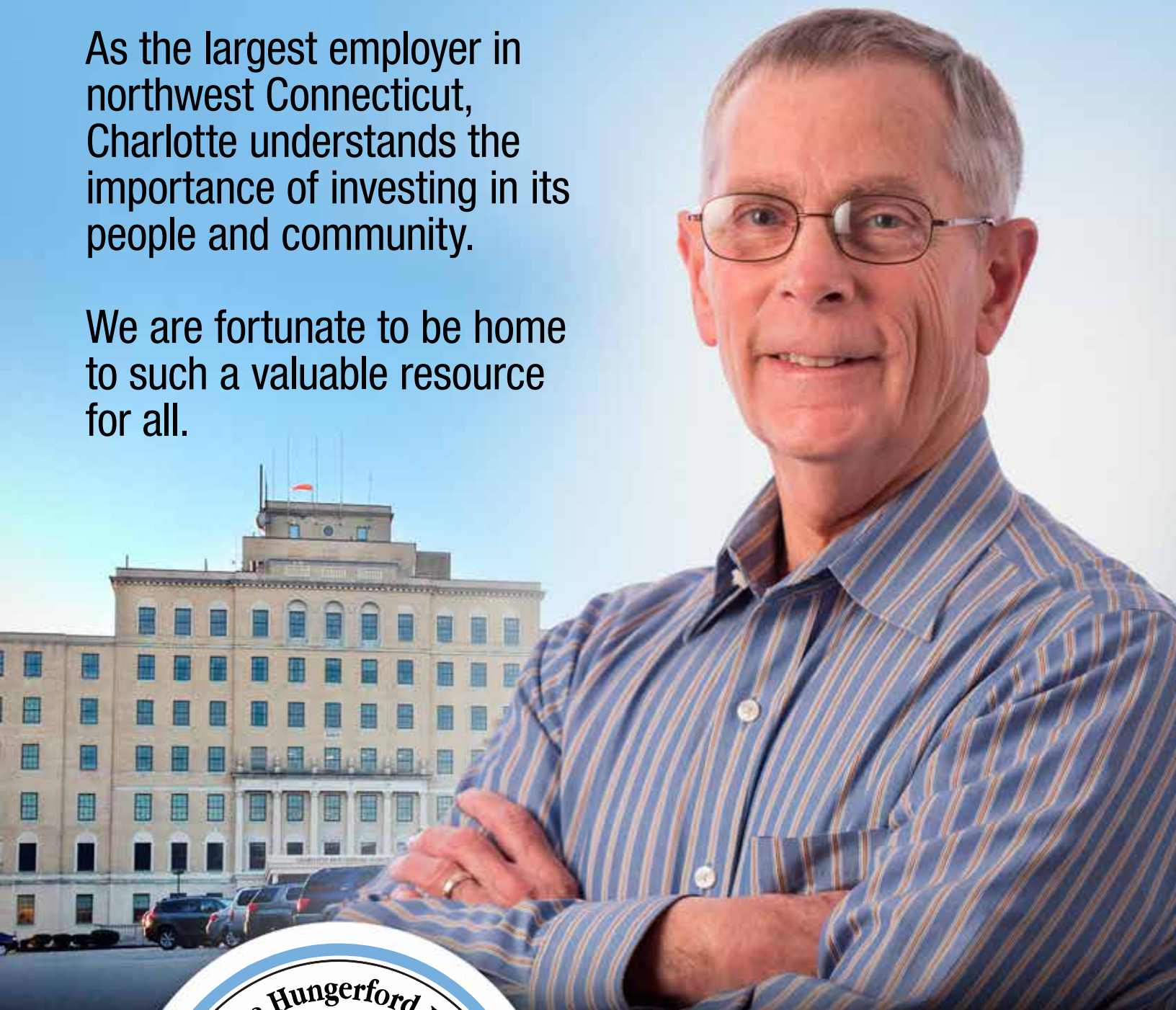
Becoming part of a larger organization like Hartford Healthcare will also enable CHH to grow needed services for the community, Capobianco says. “Physician recruitment in particular has been very difficult for certain specialties like neurology. Physicians want colleagues, they want access to clinical services that we may not be able to offer on our own because there isn’t that critical mass of patients for a full-time specialist.” Joining the larger network will increase such access and allow for collaboration, he says.

Capobianco also anticipates continued expansion within the Litchfield County community, whether through additional outpatient facilities or through preventive care initiatives like public screening. “I think there is great opportunity for us to become even more focused on our community’s health,” he says. “Hospitals have to be more focused not only on what happens within our walls, but to look out into the community and make sure we are reaching patients wherever they are.” ■

Lori Miller Kase is a freelance writer living in Simsbury.

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Snow Days in the Dark Ages

Back in the Dark Ages, long before there were text message alerts and apps designed to convey information rapidly...

Before the Internet or email...

Before personal computers propagated in homes...

Before school closings were even reported on the television...

Somewhere in the distant past, small children wearing inside-out pajamas for good luck, whose homework lay incomplete on the dining room table, a gamble on the power of Mother Nature and the prescience of the weather man, gathered 'round transistor radios as snow piled up outside, waiting as static-filled voices read off alphabetic lists of the school districts that had wisely chosen to cancel classes for the day.

There was no rhyme or reason for when the lists would be read, typically by old white men who inhabited the odd and indiscernible world of AM radio. In between news of traffic-filled bridges,

irrelevant Senate votes, and someone named Dow Jones, radio announcers would suddenly tick off the towns on the cancellation list, necessitating even the smallest of children wait by the radio for hours at a time less they miss said announcement, forgoing breakfast, bathroom breaks, and even the rarely aired Brady Bunch's "Hawaii Bound" rerun, all in hopes that they might hear their school's name spoken aloud.

These gravely voiced men read their lists dispassionately, seemingly unaware of the hopes and dreams that hung in the balance, for the name of each school district offered something that no other human being on the face of the Earth was capable of offering:

The gift of a snow day.

A snow day, which essentially amounted to the gift of time, which children at even the most tender of ages understand is the greatest gift of all. Later in life, as children decay into adults, the gift of time will be replaced

by such absurdities as handbags and gift certificates and hideous ties, but for children, there was nothing better than time.

And yes, it was true. A snow day in February meant an extra day of school in June when the sun was bright and the grass was green, but children understand one truth above all:

We could all be dead by June. An asteroid or a nuclear missile or a rip in the space-time continuum could end us all in the blink of an eye. There are no guaranteed tomorrows. We will take our days when we can get them.

So we waited by the radio as these lists of school districts were read, methodically, monotonously, absent of the fanfare they so deserved. And when they passed your town's predetermined alphabetical location without its name being called, still you waited, for occasionally, at the end of the list, the broadcaster, this demon of dispassion, would mention that one or two more

school districts had called in since he began his recitation, and he would tag these latecomers to the end, regardless of the first letter in their name.

Maybe, hopefully, unbelievably, your school district could be one.

And after your school's name has been read? What to do upon discovery that your snow day is secure?

Listen again. Listen just as closely as the list is read a second and third and fourth time, because hearing your school's name called, even after you have heard it once before, produces almost as much joy in your heart as the first time.

That is the power of a snow day.

It's all fun and games unless, of course, you are my brother. If that be the case, the opportunity to inflict unconscionable pain and suffering on you is so great, it rivals my desire to know if I have a snow day. On these days, I possess an almost superhuman ability to delay gratification, to await word on my future, and to postpone the clarion call

of my potential freedom. On these days, the torture of my brother is even more appealing than the prospect of building a fort or throwing snowballs at passing cars from the branches overhanging the road.

So as the soulless radioman approaches the alphabetic location of our school on his ever-growing list, I switch off the device, or lower its volume, or toss it deep into a closet, or lock it in the family car. I grab pot and spoon and pound the two as our school's name is read or not read. We will never know for certain because the sound of kitchen metal on kitchen metal is louder at 6:45 a.m. than any other time in human history.

I make every effort to prevent my brother from hearing or not hearing our school's name announced over the radio because the whining and groaning of my brother is far better than any music found on the FM dial.

These were dark days before .com and IOS and touchscreens. These were

the days of the analog zombies, transistor prayers, and information deprivation. They were hard times, but they were good times, too. These were the days of unbridled anticipation, unrelenting suspense, and the joyful abuse of siblings younger and more powerless than you.

The dark ages were lovely, dark, and deep, and I miss them so. ■

Matthew Dicks is a West Hartford elementary schoolteacher and author of several novels, including the 2016 Nutmeg Award nominee Memoirs of an Imaginary Friend. He's also a 23-time Moth StorySLAM champion and the co-founder of Speak Up. For more about Matthew, go to www.matthewdicks.com.

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