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The Best of

# NEW HAVEN

MARCH 2022



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IT'S MY 



# The Best of NEW HAVEN

MARCH 2022

New Haven, truly, is the place to be when it comes to Connecticut. With the best pizza pies in the nation, ocean views and a community of motivated, talented individuals to show for it, the area is a powerhouse for positivity. After careful consideration from a population of opinionated voters, the Best of New Haven results are in. All voting for this long-awaited reader's poll was conducted online, a record number of voters for this year's categories. Here, we celebrate a diversity of choices, so we've given our readers the luxury

of seeing the top three contenders for each category we offered. From restaurants, to barbershops, to the best activities in the summer sun, with what New Haven has to offer, there's something for everyone.

The people of New Haven have spoken, and what follows is a comprehensive list of the county's best in nearly every category you can possibly think of. Seriously, everything you need to know about the county is in here. Local flavor, services for the home, entertainment – we've got you covered.

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The Best of  
**NEW HAVEN**  
MARCH 2022

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# The Best of FAVORITE SHOPPING SPOTS

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A little retail therapy never hurt anyone! Lucky for New Haven-area dwellers, a wide range of shopping is at the community's fingertips. In both women and men's fashion, gifts and items for the home, New Haven offers more options than you may know how to handle. Thanks to this year's winners, a shopping spree might be hard to resist.

## **APPLIANCE DEALER**

Art's TV and Appliance North Haven  
Hallock's Branford  
Page Hardware Guilford

## **AUTO DEALER**

Brandfon Honda  
Branhaven Jeep  
Premier Subaru Branford

## **BOAT SERVICE & DEALER**

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Diamond Marine East Haven  
Milford Boat Works Milford

## **FURNITURE STORE**

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Jordan's Furniture New Haven  
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CONTINUE **FAVORITE SHOPPING SPOTS**

ON PAGE 46 FOR MORE WINNERS!

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Book display at RJ Julia Booksellers.  
Photo contributed by RJ Julia Booksellers.

A photograph of the interior of RJ Julia Booksellers, a cozy bookstore with dark wood shelving, a patterned carpet, and warm lighting. Book displays are arranged on tables and shelves. A woman is visible in the background.

# Serendipity Awaits

YOUR GUIDE TO  
UNIQUE FINDS



it

seems that the best things often find us once we've stopped looking for them. This is certainly the case in New Haven where many of the areas hidden gems have sparked light in the community and brought uniqueness to the lives of many. Below, you'll find the stories that go alongside some of the area's unconventional spots for gift-buying, shopping, eating and more.

*Serendipity* CONTINUED ON PAGE 21



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# April Showers Bring May Flowers



Essex Summer Arts Festival in the Essex town center.  
Photo contributed by Spectrum Art Gallery.



The cast of Goodspeed Musicals' THE MUSIC MAN (2019).  
Photo by Diane Sobolewski.

## ACTIVITIES FOR SPRING ARE APLENTY

...  
BY ALEX FISCHER

The coming of spring means longer hours of daylight, more sun and lots more fun. April, known for its wet weather, brings on the brainstorm of rainy-day activities to keep up the fun even when the weather isn't so great. In New Haven's greater area, there's lots to do this spring no matter rain or shine.



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# The Best of ENTERTAINMENT



## WHEN IT COMES TO A GOOD TIME, NEW HAVEN'S GOT IT GOING ON.

An evening at the theater, nightlife and concerts are all the rage, with a lively and exciting community to show for it. There are few things that compare to a cold drink with friends after a long week of work, and we have the inside scoop to all the best spots.

*Did your favorite make the cut?*

### COCKTAILS

116 Crown  
Elm City Social New Haven  
Ordinary New Haven

### HAPPY HOUR

Amarone  
Christopher Martins  
Shell and Bones

### IRISH PUB

Duffy's Tavern  
Playwright Hamden  
Tommy Sullivan's

### LIVE MUSIC RESTAURANT / BAR

Cafe Nine New Haven  
Griswold Inn Essex  
Stormy's

### LOCAL BAR

Archie Moore's  
Cafe Nine New Haven  
Eli's on the Hill Branford

### PLAYHOUSE

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# The Best of BEAUTY & WELLNESS

A healthy lifestyle is an adventure that lasts a lifetime, one that involves the awareness of how to best take care of ourselves and the ones we love most. When we find ourselves worn down from the daily stressors of life, it's important to allow ourselves the time to recharge as well as check in with physicians we trust. Through trial and error coupled neighborhood chatter, our readers know exactly where to turn.



## CHIROPRACTOR

1st Care, Dr. Barone  
Christopher Dembski  
Shoreline Family Chiropractic, Dr Matthew Paterna

## DENTIST

D'Andrea and Pantera  
Dr Katrina Wall  
Dr Vincent Michael

## VOTED BEST HAIR SALON

*Michella Alexis Hair*

Formally Couture Salon (Same Owner)



Best Salons on CT Shoreline



149 East Main Street Clinton, CT



(At left) Dr. Vincent Michael and Dr. Stacey Michael of Michael Dental. Photo contributed by Kristen Waterbury, CDA photo. (At right) During the pandemic, the staff at In Shape didn't slow their commitment to their clients. The gym built a 3,200 square foot outdoor turf area for those clients who felt safer working out outdoors. Photo contributed by Shape Fitness Club Images.



**FAMILY DOCTOR**

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CareMedica  
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In Shape Fitness Center  
mActivity

**PEDIATRIC CARE**

Charles Wetmore, Pediatric APRN  
Dr Gregory Germain  
Guilford Pediatrics

**SPA**

Aura Day Spa  
Branford River Resort and Spa  
Glam Spa

**HAIR SALON**

Ferni’s Barber Shop  
Michella Alexxis Clinton  
Timothy Pamment

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# The Best of LOCAL FLAVORS & RESTAURANTS



Last year, Dave Portnoy of Barstool Sports recognized New Haven as the “pizza capital of the U.S.” And amid lots of controversy nationwide, we know it’s true, and that the city has a lot to show for in the sauce, cheese and crust varieties. Whether it’s Pepe’s or Sally’s, you know you’re getting the best. But that’s not all, local flavor continues to impress, offering a wide range of cuisines to a community that loves to eat like no other. From fine dining to diners, the city surely has something that will pique your palate.

## AMERICAN FOOD

Eli’s  
Tavern on State  
ZINC

## ASIAN FOOD

Mr J’s Bistro  
September In Bangkok  
Taste of China

## BAKERY

G Café Bakery Branford  
Julia’s Orange  
Lucibello’s

## BBQ

Bear’s Smokehouse/  
The Stack New Haven  
Mission BBQ Orange  
Rib House East Haven

## BREAKFAST NOOK

Bella’s Cafe  
Hidden Kitchen  
North Branford  
Pantry New Haven

## BURGERS

Five Guys  
Louis’ Lunch  
Plan B



CONTINUE **LOCAL FLAVORS**  
ON PAGE 20 FOR MORE WINNERS!



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## AWARDS

**FOOD & WINE**



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Busy tasting room at Thimble Island Brewery.  
Photo contributed by Thimble Island Brewery.

# Summer is on Tap



BY ALEX FISCHER

Rob Leonard, one of the self-proclaimed “old dogs on the block,” began his brew career in 1992 making \$6 an hour at what was known at the time as New Haven Brewing on Grand Avenue. Although time has passed, his passion hasn’t faded. The current owner of New England Brewing Co. is incredibly humbled and proud to have been named one of New Haven’s top Craft Beer and Breweries.

New England Brewing Co. has a wide range of unique craft brews on tap, all of which are available for purchase in the brewery’s large taproom. Local food trucks frequent the brewery’s outdoor space during the spring and summer months, and the brewery’s website includes a calendar so customers can anticipate when their favorites will be around.

The taproom’s ambiance is similar to that of an Irish pub, welcoming to all community

members including families with kids. One of many brewery traditions is “Final Friday,” a free on-site live music event on the last Friday of every month.

Named after the Connecticut archipelago in the Long Island Sound, Thimble Island Brewery also takes home this year’s Best Craft Beer and Brewery award. Founder



# The Best of **TASTEBUDS & PROVISIONS**

There are few things more intimate than sharing a meal with someone. Maybe it's with family, friends, a first date or a coworker, but bonding over a shared meal is a unique experience for all parties involved. Luckily, the greater New Haven area is home to an abundance of fabulous eateries ranging from fine dining to classic grab-and-go joints. Looking for a new spot to try out or order takeout from? It's time to see what all your neighbors are chatting about.

## **BAGELS**

Cohen's Bagels Madison  
Bruegger's  
A.M. Bagel

## **BUTCHER**

Provisions on State New Haven  
Forte's Gourmet Market  
Amity Meat Center Woodbridge

CONTINUE **TASTEBUDS** ON PAGE 45 FOR MORE WINNERS!



Thimble Island Brewery will hosts many events throughout the spring and summer, including live music and comedy nights. Photo contributed by Thimble Island Brewery.



2022 Best of  
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MARCH 2022

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## BEST OF LOCAL FLAVORS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16



### DELI

Hornet's Nest Branford  
Katz's  
Provenzanos

### DINER

Athena II North Haven  
Parthenon Branford/OS  
Twin Pines East Haven

### FRENCH FOOD

Bar Bouchee  
Le Petit Cafe  
Union League Cafe

### ICE CREAM

Arethusa Farm Dairy  
Ashley's  
Wentworth Hamden

### INDEPENDENT FOOD MARKET

Bishop's Orchard Guilford  
Caron's Corner  
Whitneyville Food Center

### INDIAN RESTAURANT

Darbar India  
House of Naan  
Kamana Guilford



CONTINUE **LOCAL FLAVORS**  
ON PAGE 32 FOR MORE WINNERS!

# Lenny's



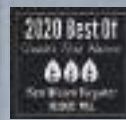
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For many, a love for reading translates into a life of adventure —constantly searching for more ways to learn and take in stories of characters we may never know. RJ Julia Booksellers, one of this year’s winners for Best Independent Bookseller, has taken love for literature to the next level and created an outlet welcoming to book-worms everywhere.

The bookstore, with locations in Madison and Middletown, along with an enormous library of selections, has hosted an array of accomplished storytellers and celebrities to speak and read to community members. Since the pandemic, all events are currently being held virtually, but the involvement hasn’t changed and if anything, has increased. Because of these interactions, meaningful experiences are plentiful and have allowed for the creation of new friendships, hobbies and safe spaces to explore.


“WE LIKE EACH PERSON’S  
EXPERIENCE TO BE UNIQUE TO  
THEM, WE CAN DIG DOWN AND  
FIND EXACTLY WHAT THEY’RE  
LOOKING FOR WHETHER IT’S FOR  
THEMSELVES OR FOR A GIFT,  
WE TRY TO MAKE SURE THAT PEOPLE  
LEAVE WITH THE RIGHT ITEM  
IN THEIR HANDS.”

LORI FAZIO  
RJ Julia’s Booksellers

Serendipity CONTINUED ON PAGE 30




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● ● ●  
BY SUSAN SHULTZ

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## "WE CARE MORE."

Dr. Matthew Paterna of Shoreline Family Chiropractic in West Haven said this is the third year his practice has been singled out on the Best of New Haven list — the above three words explain why.

"We are extremely grateful and blessed to have such great patients to take the time to write these nice things about their doctors," he said.

"It's humbling and encouraging," he said.

Paterna said at Shoreline, kindness is one of their core values. They focus on making the experience the best one they can have.

"I think people have a negative connotation when they go to a doctor's office. There's nothing personal about it, and they may have to wait a long time," Paterna said.

The practice respects its patients time and doesn't make them wait.

*Healthcare* CONTINUED ON PAGE 24





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Dr. Michael Paterna and the team from Shoreline Family Chiropractic. Photo contributed by Courtney Paterna Photo.

## "IT'S ABOUT KINDNESS AND DIGNITY."

DR. MATTHEW PATERNA  
*Shoreline Family Chiropractic*

Paterna served as the past president of the Connecticut Chiropractic Council, and this enabled him to be on the cutting edge of what's happening in the profession. It also meant he was one of the leaders who set up the COVID-19 protocols for the state's chiropractic providers. This allowed Shoreline to be on the forefront of making patients comfortable during a stressful time.

"We have gone above and beyond to making our patients comfortable and happy while given them the space to be safe. We were definitely one of the first ones out there, putting out a video showing patients how we set up the office to make it safe and efficient," he said.

These efforts have been fruitful — Paterna said the practice has so many patients it is moving to a larger facility about a half a mile away to have the space to accommodate them.

Dr. Vincent Michael of Michael Dental Care in Guilford said his practice was "very excited" to once again be named one of the "Best of New Haven."

"I think that we focus on our patients' individualized needs in a very high tech and very caring environment. They see the providers they know and trust," Michael said.

"We have a great relationship with our patients," he said.

Michael said since the practice opened in 2006, he continues to see a very loyal returning group of patients — but that certainly doesn't mean there isn't room for more.

"Our existing patient family is a very content group who feel they are well cared for, but we certainly welcome new ones," he said.

And In Shape Fitness Center of Branford knows about loyalty. COO Rob Acquavella said they are

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about to celebrate their 35th anniversary, thanks to the community's support.

He said the reason In Shape continues to earn Best of New Haven accolades is that "the customers are always first in mind."

"They will be meeting with staff that are extremely qualified. Our staff is in it for the right reasons," he said.

Trainers are there to help clients achieve whatever goals the members are seeking, and that service is not one dimensional. In Shape trainers offer nutritional guidance and supplement advice, as well as creating a unique exercise program for every client.

"We don't guess. We use advanced technology called an InBody Machine to determine someone's body fat percentage, metabolic rate and muscle mass," he said.

Acquavella said they handle the process a bit more carefully than their competitors and "our customers appreciate that."

During the pandemic, the staff at In Shape didn't slow their commitment to their clients. While others may have taken the downtime off, that wasn't the case for Acquavella and his team. They used it to upgrade a great deal of their fitness equipment.

"We never stopped working," he said.

The gym also built a 3,200 square foot outdoor turf area for those clients who felt safer working out outdoors.

The goal at In Shape is to make their clients — whether they are new to the gym or seasoned work out veterans — feel at home.

"I am very fortunate to have a welcoming and friendly staff — we have a large amount of success stories with our clients," he said.

"Our tagline is 'We want to make each workout the best part of your day,' and I'm grateful we are able to achieve that." •



Trainers are there to help clients achieve whatever solution they are seeking, and that service is not one dimensional. In Shape trainers offer nutritional guidance and supplement suggestions as well as creating an exercise prescription. Photo contributed by Shape Fitness Club Images.

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2021 Best of Greater New Haven  
New Haven Register  
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# Outdoor Dining

GO-TO GUIDE



BY ALEX FISCHER



The culture surrounding outdoor dining has certainly leveled up over the last few years, encouraging many area restaurants to capitalize on their spaces and provide an even more enjoyable dining experience for their customer base. Whether it's a three-course dinner or a paper-bag lunch from a food truck, if it can be enjoyed outside, chances are the response will be positive. This year's Best of New Haven winners have a lot to celebrate, and each restaurant is anxiously awaiting the prime time of their outdoor dining season.

Local oyster bar and grill, Shell and Bones, takes home one of this year's tops spots for Best Outdoor Dining and has a gorgeous waterfront view to show for it.

A large, beautiful deck allows for a fantastic outdoor dining experience overlooking the New Haven Harbor alongside covered seating for inclement weather or wintertime outings. The Shell and Bones design pays homage to the area's waterfront history and the dishes speak for themselves: a diverse selection of steaks, seafood and options from the raw bar.

"We built a really amazing thing at Shell and Bones, we're not just a pretty face on the water, we have amazing cuisine," Director of Operations Steve Bayusik said.



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Spectrum Art Gallery exterior in Essex, Connecticut. Photo contributed by Spectrum Art Gallery.

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For the busy-bodies and the ever-so-stressed, a self-care day never fails to lift spirits back up. The daily tasks of our lives have the tendency to pile up, and taking time to allow yourself to decompress from it all is the only way to stay on top of productivity.

Thankfully, Branford-native Sharon Cawley opened Aura Spa, amongst New Haven's 2022 winners for Best Spa, to serve the area's self-care needs. An esthetician with 25 years of experience, Cawley achieved a lifelong goal in opening her first spa nine years ago. Now, Cawley lives out her passion every day helping her clients toward wellness and says that she feels like she was made for this line of work.

Cawley's team of passionate estheticians makes it a safe space for customers of all ages and genders, and the feeling of a smaller spa makes for a more intimate experience overall.

"Taking time out for yourself is really important, we need to restore our internal energy," Cawley said.

Thanks to the abundance of packages offered at Aura Spa, the possibilities are endless. A true Branford-native, Cawley keeps her community in mind when it comes to the spa's offerings, all of which are named after Branford beaches and other local points of interest.

This spring additionally marks the official reopening at Goodspeed Musicals, the nonprofit theater organization closed to some degree since the onset of the pandemic. The community theater in East Haddam, among this year's winners for Best Playhouse, will come back strong in its 2022 season starting with Cabaret on the main stage in May.





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(Left) RJ Julia Booksellers hopes to bring back in-person events this year after a long period of livestreaming. (Right) Street view of RJ Julia Booksellers, among this year's winners for Best Independent Bookseller. Photos contributed by RJ Julia Booksellers.



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Located in the business district of downtown Woodbridge and within Lucky Soul Tattoo, Ferni's offers a classic service experience in an inviting environment where all are welcome. From today's trends to classic cuts, all haircuts are bespoke to the client, no cookie-cutting here. No hype, no hustle, just quality work. Experience it for yourself.

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# Ferni's Barbershop

The bookstore is in the process of transitioning back to an event schedule that includes all types of events, including some held entirely in-person, and others with the option of both in-person and virtual. The store's focus is to ensure that all are comfortable, and Fazio says there are many people in the community eager to come in.

RJ Julia Booksellers additionally has an array of gift offerings, including special bundles with sets of books and other compatible items.

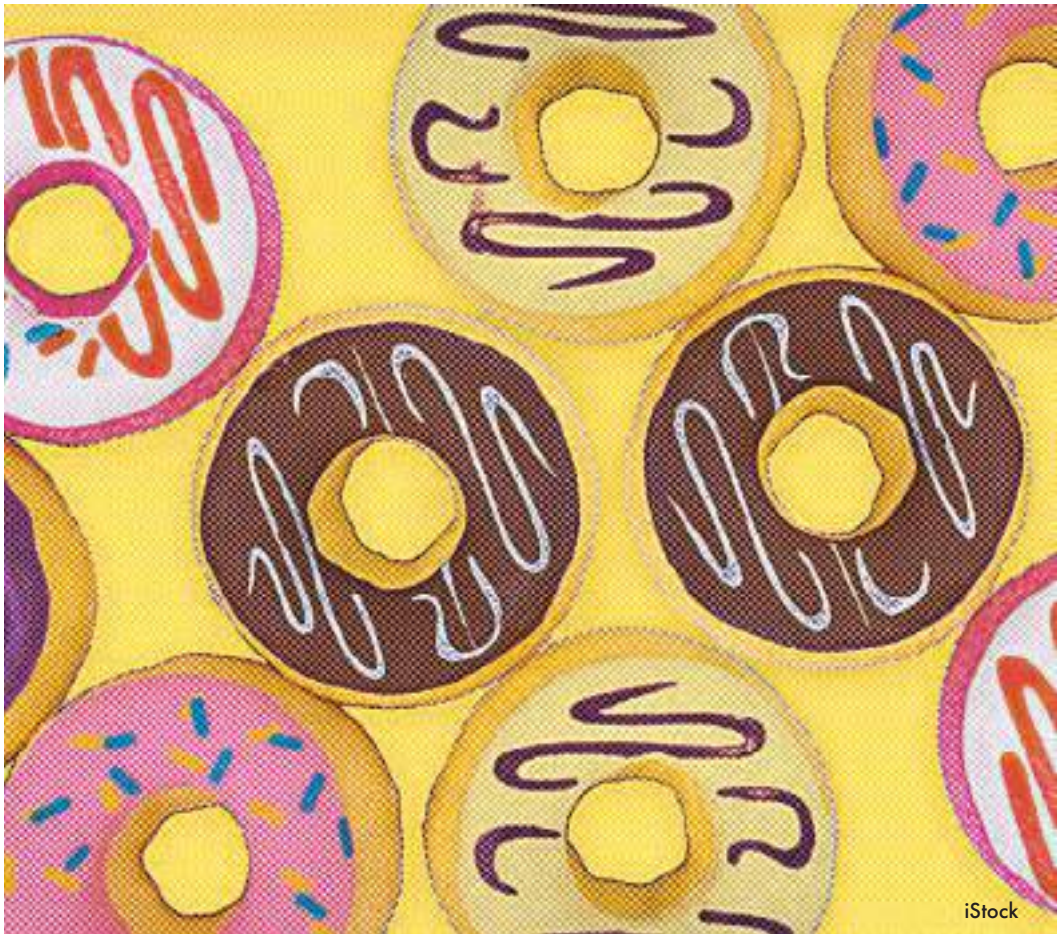
Not too far away, Neil's Donuts in Middletown and Wallingford has become a local favorite for breakfast and pastry enthusiasts. Owner Neil Bukowski began his career in the corporate world, that which came with frequent staff breakfasts. Far too often, Bukowski noshed on tasteless, dry donuts, and although a seemingly small annoyance, he ultimately rerouted his journey because of it.

On Bukowski's first day of operation at Neil's Donuts, his jelly injector broke causing him to



improvise, that which was met with positive responses; filling the donuts with flavor seemed to be an awesome idea. Customers began flocking to Neil's as their go-to donut shop, the local shop outperforming its competitors with its unique high level of quality. Now, following two decades of growth and lots and lots of donuts, Bukowski and his growing team have stuck to their roots while also expanding their donut game. With 40 varieties of donuts, glazed still are the most popular and are what drives many newcomers to the shop.

It's after walking into Neil's Donuts when visitors can see its uniqueness—a pleasing, retro interior coupled with high quality foods. In addition to the wide donut variety, freshly cooked breakfast sandwiches and coffee are also available.



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NEIL BUKOWSKI  
*Neil's Donuts*

For the crowd that prefers savory over sweet, the Madison Cheese Shop is a spot you can't miss out on. Home to more than 80 different cheese varieties, this year's New Haven winner for Best Cheeses offers top-notch experiences for every customer that comes in.

*Serendipity* CONTINUED ON PAGE 50



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*if* you're in the market for a renovation or have a project on your mind, getting Jonathan Gordon on your side is your first step in the right direction. The effects of the pandemic changed a lot— for everyone—but one trend that seems to have stuck across New Haven County and the state is a larger emphasis on home improvement. Over the last few years, we've spent more time in our homes than ever. This has been cause for many people and families to pick up their lives and move elsewhere, or for others make the best of their spaces and change them in ways that allow them to feel most like home.

*Remodeling* CONTINUED ON PAGE 37

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CONTINUE **PROFESSIONAL SERVICES** ON PAGE 52 FOR MORE WINNERS!



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Jonathan Gordon and Jonathan Rohner came together to pilot Design by the Jonathan's, an award-winning interior design firm based out of New Haven, CT. This year, the firm was recognized by Hearst Connecticut Media Group's reader's poll as Best Home Remodeler along with John F. Murphy Construction and Santoro Home Improvements. In light of all the changes in the home remodeling space, Design by the Jonathan's has cultivated more creativity than ever before, specializing their offerings to every client's taste and preference.

The custom services range from residential to commercial projects, including kitchens, home offices, bathrooms, additions, basements, lighting and interior design expertise encapsulating it all. Gordon and his team serve as the creative geniuses and the go-getter's of every project, with an unmatched ability to make every client's big idea into a reality.

**Remodeling** CONTINUED ON PAGE 47



Bathroom renovation by Design by the Jonathans. Photo contributed by Design by the Jonathans.

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Seafood spread at Lenny and Joe's Fish Tale. Photo contributed by Lenny and Joe's Fish Tale.

As the only restaurant in the state recognized by The James Beard Foundation as "Committed to the goals of the Smart Catch Program," the kitchen's focus is on sustainability, something that the community has shown great support towards. In utilizing fresh and sustainable ingredients, Chef Franco Camacho amazes guests with unbelievable cuisine including a stellar clam chowder, The Big Taste competition of greater New Haven's first prize dish.

"We're very grateful for all of our loyal guests that supported us throughout the pandemic and through these challenging times," Bayusik said, who is incredibly excited for another fun Shell and Bones summer.

The restaurant is also recognized for its award-winning wine list, the variety of blends encompassing all the major growing wine regions of the world. Additionally, a cocktail program is led by a talented team of staff who prioritize working with freshly squeezed juices whenever possible.

At Lenny and Joe's Fish Tale, a local favorite for lobster rolls and summer fun, outdoor dining is in the restaurant's lifeblood. The casual picnic table set up is the perfect place for laughs with friends and family alongside the restaurant's beloved carousel, that which has generated over \$1 million benefitting worthy causes in the Madison community. After an off year in 2021, the Fish Tale plans to bring the carousel back to life this season.

This year, Lenny and Joe's Fish Tale won Best Chowder, Best Lobster Roll and Best Outdoor Dining, none of which are unusual for the Madison and Westbrook spot. The Fish Tale has been a top contender for decades, going far back to the days when the Hearst Connecticut Media Group Reader's Poll happened via pen and paper, Owner Joe Goldberg recalled.



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Summer crowd at Lenny and Joe's Fish Tale. Photo contributed by Lenny and Joe's Fish Tale.

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STEVE BAYUSIK  
Shell & Bones

*Outdoor Dining* CONTINUED ON PAGE 40



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The Fish Tale's outdoor ambiance is both fun and casual, exactly like a summer night should be. Goldberg and his Fish Tale team have been loyal to the community for decades, bringing back several area families that have found a second home at the waterfront restaurant.

In Guilford, The Place restaurant is known to rule the outdoor dining scene with its unique style. The tree stump seating and visible wood fire cooking takes your typical backyard barbeque up a notch or two, offering fresh,

high-quality, and oftentimes locally sourced seafood. The restaurant is best known for its roast clam special and roaster corn.

Owner Vaughn Anowles and his wife worked together while in high school at Whitey's Roast, a seafood restaurant that closed down in 1971. The pair decided to then take it over, creating something to call their own. For the last 51 years, The Place has been grounds for summer fun and fresh food, especially during the pandemic when interests in outdoor dining skyrocketed.

What's unique about The Place is not only its unconventional seating arrangement, but guests can bring their own side dishes and beverages. Anowles says that many dining guests even bring their own tablecloths.

The results are in—Shell and Bones, Lenny and Joe's Fish Tale and The Place are all spots you can't miss out on this spring and summer. Grab your friends and family to enjoy a dining experience that's sure to impress. ●

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Summer crowd at Lenny and Joe's Fish Tale. Photo contributed by Lenny and Joe's Fish Tale.

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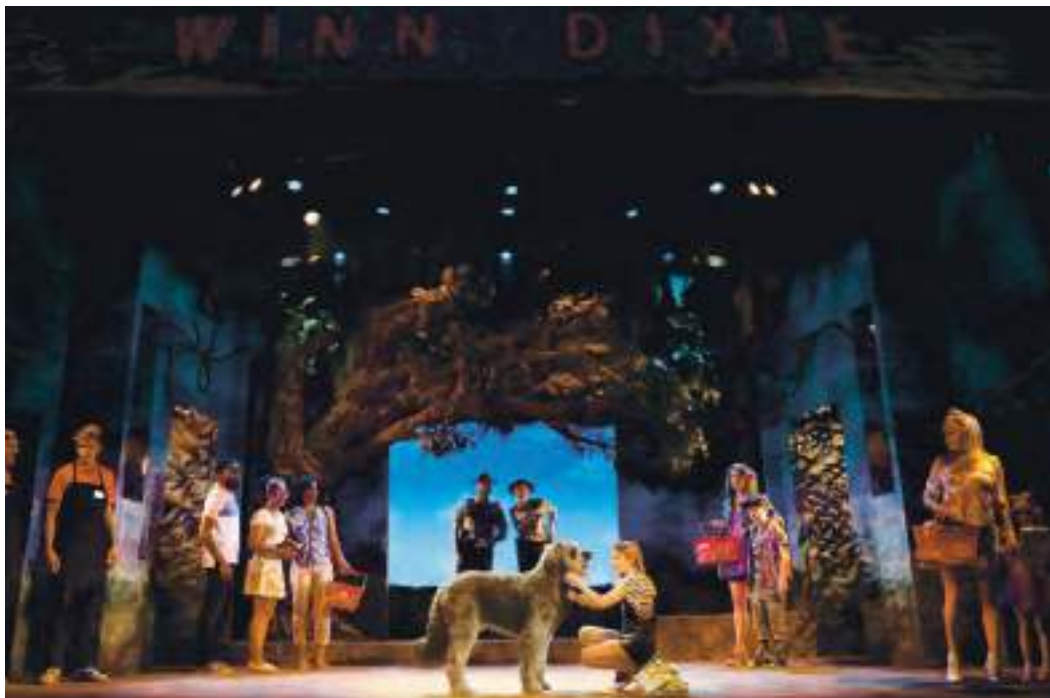
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The cast of Goodspeed Musicals' BECAUSE OF WINN DIXIE (2019). Photo by Diane Sobolewski.

The intimate, bucolic ambiance of Goodspeed's opera house provides the perfect environment for theater. In addition to an attractive lineup of musical productions, the theater honors the community by providing an outlet for expression. A variety of programming and workshops are available for both kids and adults including Kids Company Ensembles and educational initiatives. Perhaps the most popular event is the Festival of New Musicals, staged readings of continually developed musicals that are performed to the public on The Goodspeed stage. The festival additionally involves a Symposium, break-out sessions, cabarets, and a Meet-the-Writers session.

"We're thrilled, we know that our patrons are thrilled," Managing Director David Byrd said. "At the heart of it all, attending live performances soothes the soul and feeds the spirit."

Goodspeed Musicals serves as an economic driver in the community, bringing together like-minded individuals with a desire to support the theater. The theater's last large musical production wrapped in early 2020 just before the onset of the pandemic, creating a large amount of excitement for all that's to come in 2022.

"The scope and scale of our productions are really impressive," Byrd said of Goodspeed's unique qualities. "We are exclusively a musical theater institution, that's something that is different than a lot of folks."

At Goodspeed Musicals, the show must go on, no matter rain or shine. Visit the theatre website to purchase tickets and learn more about the array of musicals.

An art gallery is the perfect place to spend a rainy day; Essex's own Spectrum Art Gallery offering several exciting events and exhibitions

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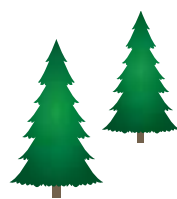


Rashidra Scott and the cast of Goodspeed Musicals' ANYTHING GOES (2016). Photo by Diane Sobolewski.

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INTO THE GALLERY AND  
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ABOUT HOW MUCH THEY  
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BARBARA NAIR  
Spectrum Art Gallery

*April Showers* CONTINUED ON PAGE 44



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this spring. The first, Animals and People in the Landscape, presents a myriad of different art forms including photography, mixed media and painting. This early spring show opens March 26 for its open house weekend and reception and will stay on display for the six weeks that follow.

**“WE’RE THRILLED, WE KNOW THAT OUR PATRONS ARE THRILLED. AT THE HEART OF IT ALL, ATTENDING LIVE PERFORMANCES SOOTHES THE SOUL AND FEEDS THE SPIRIT.”**

DAVID BYRD *Goodspeed*

The gallery, a local nonprofit, is passionate about its involvement within Essex and the surrounding towns. This year, Spectrum Art Gallery was recognized as one of New Haven’s Best Gift Shops.

In the early summer, the New Haven County community has developed tradition around the arts festival on the Essex Green, a celebration that Spectrum Art Gallery heavily participates in. This beautiful event in Essex’s town center is the weekend of June 18 and 19.

“There’s tremendous amount of support for the arts,” Barbara Nair said, the gallery director. “The shoreline has a tremendous amount of people that come into the gallery and can’t say enough about how much they love the art.”

The gallery is open to the public Wednesday through Sunday, and Nair says that the gallerists love to see walk-in visitors and educate them about the art on display. The gallery additionally hosts a handful of exciting workshops for children, adults, aspiring artists and beginners.

The Felted Critters workshop is available all throughout April, in which participants make felt rabbits in anticipation of Easter Sunday. For those interested in something more advanced, the April 24 workshop, Painting a Daffodil in Watercolor, is the way to go. In May, a Paper Quilling Workshop will focus on the coming of spring.

“There is a real sense in everyone that runs the gallery of root curiosity and caring about people,” Nair said. “[The gallery is] a contemporary bright space with tons of natural light and gallery lighting, everything is spacious and spread out, people can really see what’s there and enjoy it.”

To learn more, visit [www.spectrumartgallery.org](http://www.spectrumartgallery.org), [www.goodspeedmusicals.org](http://www.goodspeedmusicals.org), and [www.auradayspact.com](http://www.auradayspact.com). ●

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Seafood spread at Lenny and Joe's Fish Tale. Photo contributed by Lenny and Joe's Fish Tale.

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Material Girls in Orange. Photo contributed by Kristina Kaoud.

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"Connecticut is on the rise, and with that comes a massive boom of renovation, remodeling and making spaces home," Gordon said.

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WANT TO LIVE IT."**

"We don't just have one style that we recycle, we develop designs specific to our clients taste," he continued. Gordon and his team of designers work to make the process as seamless as possible, utilizing with 3-D visuals to give clients a real idea of what their space can look like. The team then hands the project off to a team of well-informed builders, renovators or contractors to execute the vision.

Tony D'Agostino of Santoro Home Improvements has done a phenomenal job as well faring the changes in the home improvement industry, taking home one of the winning titles for New Haven's Best Home Remodeler. The custom design and building company specializes in home remodeling as well as construction for residential and commercial establishments. D'Agostino says his crew handles a handful of sizable projects, placing them in the middle of the spectrum between large national, commercial builders and a small group with a single pick-up truck.

As many families in and around New Haven spent quarantine inside their homes, it was impossible not to notice the shortcomings of certain spaces. This has motivated many homeowners to put more effort into home improvement, allowing Santoro Home Improvements to soar.



Kitchen renovation by Design by the Jonathans. Photo contributed by Design by the Jonathans.



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and CEO Justin Gargano says brewing was a hobby that ultimately turned into a career, one he's been in for the last 12 years after a successful run in the technology industry. A Branford native, Gargano grew up as a Boy Scout and ultimately became a junior volunteer firefighter with the Stony Creek Fire Department. His formative experiences, he says, served as a big contributor to his current involvement in the community through not only offering craft beers, but providing positive experiences for all in the greater New Haven area.

## "THANK YOU, WE'RE FLATTERED AND HONORED TO BE VOTED IN THE TOP THREE."

TIM WILSON *East Rock Brewing Company*

"It just had a large impact on me for what it's like to give back to the community and help folks on that level," he said. "I'm very ingrained in this town and care about it, I'm happy that we've been able to be successful and gain the support that we have."

As the community has showed continued interest in breweries, especially with the oncoming of warmer weather, Gargano finds it important to offer an environment where people can enjoy craft beers with friends and family.

"A gathering place for people is important, in a world of social media, I think there's something that folks still find attractive about sitting down and talking," he said of Thimble Island Brewery's tap room and outdoor spaces.

Taking a bit of a different approach, the German-inspired East Rock Brewing Company focuses on a mix of authentic lager and wheat beer, venturing away from some IPA's that other breweries are known for. The Brewing Company attracts many visitors who are specifically interested in the German brew specialty, and others from the community that simply want to show their support.

Owner Tim Wilson went to school in Chicago and in Germany to learn about the science and technology of making beer. "I fell in love with the various styles of beer there, the beer culture and the pride of both the brewers and the general public as it relates to the culture of their beer," he said of his experiences.

After working at a friend's brewery in the Boston area, Wilson returned to his roots. He and his brother, Shaun, growing up in Orange, always viewed New Haven as "the cultural hub of Connecticut," therefore the perfect place to open a brewery when the brew craze began.

New Haven area folks take a lot of pride in their city, and with that comes immense, sincere support of small local business.



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(lorchō) n. A terra cotta urn used for storing olive oil.

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The 3500-sq ft beer hall has semi-private event space for small to medium sized groups, and is home to several fun brewery traditions. Trivia has become quite popular, its creation happening entirely in-house from the creativity of one very special employee. Wilson says the crowds have become familiar with the trivia master and expect his presence in the beer hall.

With spring on the horizon, several seasonal releases and events are around the corner including the Key Lime Kicker release, the Mother's Day Vendor Market and the Traditional MaiBock Brew, a strong golden lager brewed in Germany to celebrate the end of winter and the coming of spring.

"Thank you, we're flattered and honored to be voted in the top three," Wilson said.

To learn more, be sure to visit brewery websites: [www.thimbleislandbrewery.com](http://www.thimbleislandbrewery.com), [www.eastrockbeer.com](http://www.eastrockbeer.com), and [www.newenglandbrewing.com](http://www.newenglandbrewing.com). ●



German-inspired East Rock Brewing Company focuses on a mix of authentic lager and wheat beer. Photo contributed by East Rock Brewing Company.



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Charcuterie boards have taken off in recent years, and Madison Cheese Shop responded with an array of different options for those who love to entertain groups both big and small. The shop offers large charcuterie displays for purchase along with smaller plates, called "nibbles." Samples are available, too, along with cheeses cut to order, a grab-and-go fridge and retail items related to cheese. Even if you choose to craft your own original charcuterie board, the shop has all the fix-ins you might need.

Owner Fawn Nebinger opened the shop in 2008 and has worked alongside her son, familiarizing themselves in the world of cheese from the ground up. Somewhere along the way Nebinger experimented with grilled cheese sandwiches, that which prompted the creation of a café.

"We have really creative combinations of sandwiches," Nebinger said. "Because we have access to the best cheeses in the world, that stuff all goes into our sandwiches."



“IT REALLY HELPS, ESPECIALLY DURING COVID, TO KEEP THAT POSITIVITY AND KEEP GOING, WE CHANGED OUR WAYS AND ADAPTED TO WHAT WE HAD TO CONSIDERING WHAT WAS GOING ON,”

KRISTINA KAOUD  
*Material Girls*

The local Madison Cheese Shop has grown over the years, developing a loyal customer base of cheese enthusiasts. There aren't a lot of places where personal attention is a big deal, Nebinger says, and it's guaranteed that each customer will leave the shop with a cheesy treat that's right for them.

Another unique find in and around New Haven is Material Girls in Orange, one of this year's winners for Best Women's Fashion and Best Gift Shop. The Boutique is owned by business-savvy Kristina Kaoud, a woman with an eye for fashion and interior design. From the looks of the boutique, Kaoud's unique design sense is shown through displays of antique furniture and exquisite pieces on every hanger. After 11 years in Orange, the boutique interior is pleasing to the eye and inviting of all shoppers.

The boutique has something for every taste, budget and age, including clothing, jewelry, accessories and gifts. Many designer pieces and items are sold in the boutique, but at affordable rates you may not find elsewhere. Most recently, Kaoud says handbags and totes have been flying off the shelves in her store given a rise in popularity.

Kaoud and her team are extremely caring toward each person who visits the boutique, and this persisted all throughout the pandemic with regular livestreams on Facebook. On the livestreams, in-store items are showcased alongside their stories, many of which resonated with viewers. The Facebook livestreams have gained a following from many local residents, along with others from further away who Kaoud regularly sends packages to. There are no

plans to stop the livestreams even though customers have been able to shop in-person.

“It really helps, especially during COVID, to keep that positivity and keep going, we changed our ways and adapted to what we had to considering what was going on,” Kaoud said.

To learn more about New Haven's unique finds, visit [www.rjjulia.com](http://www.rjjulia.com), [www.neilsdonuts.com](http://www.neilsdonuts.com), [www.shopmaterialgirlsboutique.com](http://www.shopmaterialgirlsboutique.com), [www.madisoncheese.com](http://www.madisoncheese.com). •

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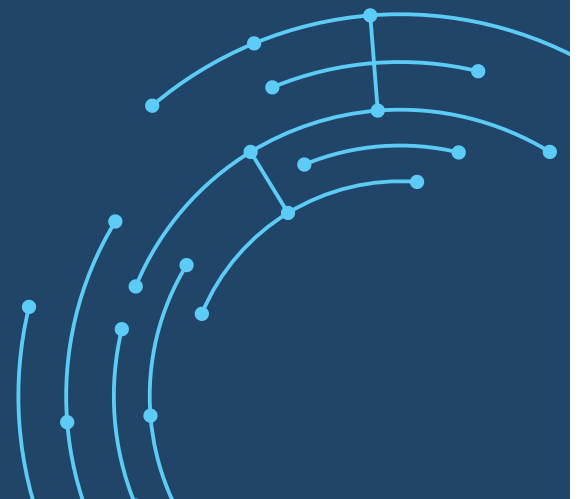
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Santoro Home Improvements has been responsible for the remodel of many magnificent homes and spaces, this includes additions, bathrooms, decks, basements, kitchens and more. D'Agostino says that home additions have been among the most popular projects of the last few years, primarily for families interested in moving in their elder relatives.

**"THERE'S NOTHING  
COOKIE-CUTTER  
ABOUT ANY OF  
THE PROJECTS THAT  
WE DO."**

TONY D'AGOSTINO  
*Santoro Home Improvements*

As Santoro Home Improvements continues to evolve, members of the community make the wheels turn fast with their kind testimonials and referrals.

D'Agostino's advises the greater New Haven community to be intentional in their desire to change pieces of their homes, however, taking the time to validate a builder's credentials is essential. Do your research and due diligence, and you're sure to have a positive result.

For more information, visit [www.thejonathans.com](http://www.thejonathans.com), [www.santorobuilding.com](http://www.santorobuilding.com). ●

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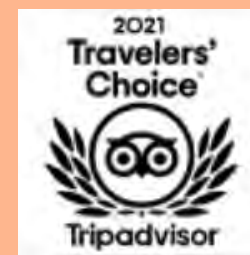
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