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PUBLICATION TEAM

PUBLISHER:

Gina Giannone
ggiannone@
bestversionmedia.com
917-714-8045

CONTENT COORDINATOR:

Jessica Hernandez
jessicahernandez@
bestversionmedia.com

CONTRIBUTING WRITER:

Elizabeth Donnelly

DESIGNER:

Rainy Whittaker

PHOTOGRAPHER:

Dariusz Terepka Photography
www.bestinct.com
718-415-2418

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FEEDBACK/IDEAS/SUBMISSIONS:

Westport Coastal Neighbors, this is your magazine. We want to hear from you! From general feedback to ideas & suggestions to cover story/family nominations to local interest content, recipes, photos, kids sports, pets, events, classifieds and more-please reach out to us at ggiannone@bestversionmedia.com.

CONTENT SUBMISSION DEADLINES:

Content Due: Edition Month:
September 24 November

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS & RESOURCES

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Police Non-Emergency	(203) 341-6000
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Human Services	(203) 341-1050
Alzheimer's Resource Finder	(800) 272-3900
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Crisis Hotline	Call 988
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Call Before You Dig	(800) 922-4455

When you support Hello Neighbors, and our local community publications Greenfield Hill Neighbors, Fairfield Coastal Neighbors, Westport Coastal Neighbors, and Easton Neighbors, you in turn support our local community and all the good we do. You support bringing people together through positive, uplifting, and educational content. You support the non-profit organizations right in your community which we bring more awareness to and help to grow. And you support the local, small business that we too are. Thank you to all of the business sponsors, readers, contributors and other supporters that make this publication possible.

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Licensed Realtor in CT
📞 203.451.6807
✉ amy.swanson@raveis.com
🌐 www.amyswansonhomes.com
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Amy Swanson, an award-winning real estate agent with William Raveis Real Estate Westport, is a standout for her exceptional client-focused approach. With over 20 years of design and marketing experience, she offers a personalized, tech-savvy service, blending market expertise with straightforward, sound advice. Clients praise Amy's seamless abilities to simplify complexities, market homes effectively, and form lasting relationships. Her dedication ensures successful, stress-free transactions, making her a consummate professional in the local real estate market while also earning her a spot in the Chairman's Elite Club alongside the most successful agents in her industry.



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FLAVORS OF HOPE: A Taste of Community and Compassion

By Janet Freimuth

Please mark your calendars for September 12, 2025, and join us for the Flavors of Hope event at the Fairfield Museum and History Center at 6 pm, a celebration of great food, local flavors, and a powerful mission.

This annual gathering brings together chefs, food lovers, and generous supporters to raise funds for Children in Placement Connecticut Inc., an organization dedicated to advocating for children in foster care. Enjoy delicious dishes from a variety of local vendors, participate in a silent auction, and experience an evening filled with hope, community spirit, and the joy of giving back.

Whether you're a longtime supporter or new to the event, Flavors of Hope promises a memorable night that makes a difference in the lives of children who need it most.



For more information, visit:
<https://www.childreninplacement.org/flavorsofhope>.

SUSTAINABLE WESTPORT TIP

By Verity Blackburn
 Community Engagement,
 Sustainable Westport



Swapping out your summer wardrobe? If you need to purchase new this fall instead of rewearing or shopping secondhand, opt for clothing made of natural fibers (like cotton or linen) instead of synthetic fibers (polyester, nylon, acrylic). Synthetic fibers shed microplastics into waterways and are a huge source of plastic waste in landfills. Every item makes a difference!

Follow @sustainablewestport for more tips.

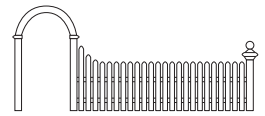
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MONTHLY MANTRA

By Marilyn Zavidow

Learning to
 live
 is learning to
 let go.

Sogyal Rinpoche

SEPTEMBER

Calendar

WEDNESDAYS THROUGHOUT THE MONTH

TELL A YARN...

@Westport Library

What could be better than working on your favorite knitting or crocheting project while someone reads out loud to you? Join our yarn circle/adult story time for your productive relaxation! A free event!

Time: 1:30-3 pm
westportlibrary.org

FIRST TUESDAY OF THE MONTH

BOOKS & BITES

@Westport Library

Share your reading recommendations at Books and Bites. Guests will share and recommend their top titles from time to time. Enjoy coffee, tea, and light refreshments while we continue to share our top reads for the month. This is a 'no commitment' group, so you can simply share your titles or listen to the recommendations!

Time: 10:00am - 11:00am
https://westportlibrary.org

WEDNESDAYS THROUGHOUT THE MONTH

WESTPORT WEDNESDAYS - 3 COURSE PRIX FIX

@Zucca Gastrobar, 30 Charles St Westport

The 3-course prix fixe is \$29.95, and a full menu is also available. Wine/cocktail/martini specials.

Time: 3pm - close
zuccagastrobar.com

WEDNESDAYS THROUGHOUT THE MONTH

CHESS CLUB FOR ADULTS

@Westport Library

Drop by for a chess game on Wednesdays! There will be open play and instruction available for adults and high school students who are familiar with the game. A free event!

Time: 6:30-9 pm
westportlibrary.org

SATURDAYS THROUGHOUT THE MONTH

SATURDAYS AT EARTHPLACE

@Earthplace, Westport

Come on over to Earthplace for a new nature-based activity for kids. We will explore, create, climb, learn, and enjoy the great outdoors! This is a free event!

Time: 12 pm-1 pm
earthplace.org

EVERY FRIDAY AND SATURDAY

LIVE MUSIC AT THE BLACK DUCK

@Black Duck Westport

Come and have fun at the Black Duck; bring your friends and family. For the band schedule, visit: https://www.blackduckwestport.com/index.php?task=live_bands

Time: 6:30 pm

EVERY THURSDAY THROUGH MARCH

WESTPORT FARMERS' MARKET

Gilbertie's Herbs and Gardens

7 Sylvan Lane

Held in the greenhouses of Gilbertie's Herbs and Gardens, the market offers a sanctuary of warmth, wellness, and community—a perfect escape on a chilly winter's day.

Time: 10:00 am - 2:00 pm

SAT., SEPTEMBER 6TH

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER DAY

@Earthplace

As the largest open space in Westport, the 62-acre wildlife sanctuary at Earthplace is a vital hub for local biodiversity and education. We are asking our community to join us in caring for the land by removing invasive plant species and tending to the trails.

Time: 10:00 am - 12:30 pm

SAT., SEPTEMBER 6TH

LARRY SILVER - SEVEN DECADES OF PHOTOGRAPHY

@MoCA CT

Discover seven decades of American life through the lens of acclaimed photographer Larry Silver. From his early days capturing the streets and subways of New York City to his iconic images of Muscle Beach in Santa Monica, Silver's work is a powerful chronicle of the nation's evolving social landscapes.

Time: 5:00 pm - 7:00 pm

SUN., SEPTEMBER 7TH

WINGED WONDERS

@Earthplace

Experience our birds of prey outside their enclosures! On the first Sunday of the month, we host a bird-on-glove demonstration where you can learn all about some of our magnificent raptors. Naturalists will discuss the animals' traits, behaviors, and unique characteristics while the birds interact with their handlers.

Time: 1:00 pm

SUN., SEPTEMBER 7TH

PICK YOUR OWN BOUQUET

@Earthplace

Cut your own bouquet from the beautiful flowers being grown in the Earthplace garden! We'll have a wide variety of flowers, including dahlias, sweet peas, zinnias, snapdragons, Chamaeleon aster, cosmos, coreopsis, gomphrena, and more.

Time: 2:00 pm - 3:00 pm

MON., SEPTEMBER 8TH

STUFFED ANIMAL SLEEPOVER

@Westport Library

Bring a stuffed friend to the Library on Friday for fun and crafts — then leave your stuffed toy at the Library overnight for a special toys-only sleepover.

Time: 4:00 pm - 5:00 pm

WED., SEPTEMBER 10TH

BOOKED FOR THE EVENING 2025:

SARAH JESSICA PARKER

@Westport Library

BOOKED for the evening, The Westport Library's signature fundraising event, will celebrate its 26th edition this fall by welcoming Emmy Award-winning actor, producer, publisher, and businesswoman Sarah Jessica Parker.

Time: 8:00 pm - 9:30 pm

SAT., SEPTEMBER 13TH

DESTINATION WESTPORT: IN GATSBY'S SHOES

@Longshore Mariana

Step Into the Roaring Twenties: Fitzgerald's Summer in Westport - A Tour Like No Other!

Time: 9:30 am - 11:00 am

SAT., SEPTEMBER 13TH

VIC DIBIETTO

@Westport Country Playhouse

Comedian Vic DiBietto — the "Italian Hurricane" — churns energy, honesty, and humanity into nonstop laughter. The bottom line is, DiBietto leaves his audiences breathless with laughter.

Time: 8:00 pm

SUN., SEPTEMBER 14TH

NATURE THEATER: A HARVEST HOMECOMING

@Earthplace

Join us in our shaded amphitheater for this funny play about how different animals get ready for winter.

Time: 12:00 pm - 1:30 pm

TUES., SEPT. 16TH

PAGETURNERS BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP:

'LADY TAN'S CIRCLE OF WOMEN'

@Westport Library

Lady Tan's Circle of Women is set in 15th-century China during the Ming Dynasty, immersing you in this captivating historical fiction novel about female camaraderie when women were often marginalized and oppressed.

Time: 11:00 am - 12:00 pm

TUES., SEPT. 16TH

BOOK LAUNCH & AUTHOR TALK: STACY

WALDMAN BASS ON HER NEW MEMOIR, 'LIGHTKEEPER: A MEMOIR THROUGH THE LENS OF LOVE AND LOSS'

@Westport Library

Join photographer Stacy Waldman Bass as she discusses her new memoir, Lightkeeper: A Memoir Through the Lens of Love and Loss, in her hometown with fellow memoirist and mentor Dani Shapiro.

Time: 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm

WED., SEPTEMBER 17TH

ARTIST RECEPTION: LINN

CASSETTA ON 'EGGCENTRIC'

@Westport Library

Eggcentric will be on display in the Jesup Gallery from August 2nd through October 5th. There will be a reception from 6 to 7 pm, followed by a conversation between Cassetta and Miggs Burroughs from 7 to 8

pm. Eggs are represented in every piece of art Linn Cassetta makes.

Time: 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm

THURS., SEPT. 18TH

ART TALK WITH THE TOD

PAPAGEORGE + LISA KERESZI

@MoCA CT

Hear from the exhibiting artist of At the Beach, Tod Papageorge, in conversation with one of his former students, the organizer of this exhibition, photographer and educator, Lisa Kereszi.

Time: 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm

FRI., SEPTEMBER 19TH

KICKOFF TO FALL: HAPPY

HOUR COOKING CLASS

@Westport Library

Kick-start the fall season with exciting new flavors and fun! Join Chef Catherine from TastebudsCT for a lively, happy hour cooking class featuring demonstrations on crafting both savory and sweet seasonal bites.

Time: 4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

FRI., SEPTEMBER 19TH

KIDS' NIGHT OUT: AN EARTHPLACE CAMPOUT

@Earthplace

Take the night off while we take care of the kids! Please drop them off for an evening of fun and learning at Earthplace. Kids can look forward to gathering around the fire to roast s'mores.

Time: 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm

SAT., SEPTEMBER 20TH

CANOE PADDLE

@Earthplace

Our canoe paddles are a great way to spend an afternoon on the water with family and friends! We will travel along the Saugatuck River in search of osprey, egrets, turtles, and more!

Time: 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm

SUN., SEPTEMBER 21ST

CAMPFIRE: FALL EQUINOX

@Earthplace

Celebrate the start of fall, y'all! Create leaf critters and share s'mores around the fire.

Time: 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm

THURS., SEPT. 25TH

AN EVENING WITH PETER GREENBERG, CBS

NEWS TRAVEL EDITOR AND BEST-SELLING

AUTHOR OF 'THE TRAVEL DETECTIVE'

@Westport Library

Greenberg will be in conversation with his longtime friend and colleague Allen Swerdlowe, Y's Men of Westport-Weston member, architect, and worldwide traveler.

Time: 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm

SAT., SEPTEMBER 27TH

DESTINATION WESTPORT: BLACK STORIES

@Westport Museum for History & Culture

Step back in time and discover the powerful, untold stories of Westport's African American community! Join us for a guided walking tour through downtown Westport, based on the Museum's award-winning exhibit Remembered: The History of African Americans in Westport.

Time: 9:30 am - 11:00 am

SUN., SEPTEMBER 28TH

CELEBRATE THE MID-AUTUMN

FESTIVAL WITH THE NEW HAVEN

CHINESE CULTURAL COOPERATIVE

@Westport Library

In the spirit of the upcoming Mid-Autumn Festival, a traditional Chinese holiday, the New Haven Chinese Cultural Cooperative (NHCCC) is sharing music about the harvest moon and nostalgia, all played on traditional Chinese instruments. This concert is open to all ages — bring the whole family!

Time: 2:00 pm - 3:00 pm

Our curated calendar is very popular! Please reach out to ggiannone@bestversionmedia.com to add your event. Be mindful of the cutoff dates: September 24th for November events and October 24th for December events.



LEADERSHIP WITH VISION JENNIFER TOOKER FIRST SELECTWOMAN OF WESTPORT

By Jessica Hernandez with Jennifer Tooker | Photos by Dariusz Terepka Photography



In an era when local governance often feels remote, Jennifer Tooker, Westport's dedicated First Selectwoman, is redefining what authentic, inclusive, and results-oriented leadership looks like on the town level.

Tooker proudly reports that Westport residents are given many avenues to share input on town issues and projects, from public comment sessions at the Board of Education, Board of Finance, and RTM, to charrettes, forums, and special meetings. "Sometimes it takes longer to get things done, but the outcomes are far stronger," she explains. Her approach is rooted in transparency and access: monthly newsletters, local podcasts, social media, and frequent in-person and digital outreach. "Informed residents become engaged residents," she affirms, and Westporters are among the most engaged you'll find.

For Tooker, civil discourse is the bedrock of democracy. She believes in treating others with respect, even, especially, in disagreement. "As a leader, I model the

behavior I want our children to see," she says. She speaks passionately when necessary, but always with kindness and openness to other viewpoints. Setting a respectful tone at the top, she insists, is essential for community cohesion.

One major initiative under Tooker's leadership is the proposed Westport Public Safety Complex, currently in the conceptual stage. Designed to consolidate and modernize outdated police, fire, and EMS facilities, the complex would provide shared efficiencies, training space, conference rooms, and operational synergies. "Our first responders deserve facilities that match the professionalism and dedication they bring each day," she emphasizes.

To date, a public charrette has allowed residents to view preliminary renderings and engage with public safety leaders directly, and feedback that has already begun shaping the design. "This is just the beginning of a transparent, iterative process," she affirms, reiterating her



commitment to stakeholder involvement at every step.

Initiatives like Westport Means Business and StartUp Westport have transformed the local economic landscape under Tooker's leadership. Westport now boasts one of the highest commercial occupancy rates in Fairfield County, evidence of a thriving, business-friendly environment. She places special emphasis on supporting small and women-owned businesses, describing them as "the lifeblood of our local economy."

A champion for youth well-being, Tooker helped launch Westport Together in 2019 when she was Second Selectwoman. Focusing on youth mental health, advocacy, and community connection, the alliance

brings together schools, families, and local partners. "The pandemic underscored the urgency of these programs," she notes, and expanding them remains a priority.

During Civic Learning Week at Staples High School, Tooker brings real-world government to students by sharing first-hand experiences and fostering open dialogue. "It's always a two-way learning experience," she says. "They're smart. I walk away inspired."

Tooker is careful to keep her focus local, but sees urgent challenges on the horizon for Connecticut, including very high tax burdens, expensive electricity, and significant unfunded debt. "It's increasingly hard to live, or grow a business, here," she warns. While she remains rooted in Westport through this November, she has officially announced her run for governor in 2026 as she believes she is uniquely positioned to address these issues.

Tooker's tenure in international reinsurance and over a decade living in London sharpened her strategic acuity and operational rigor. "Corporate leadership teaches you how to set strategy, drive execution, manage budgets, and motivate teams," she reflects. That global exposure, she says, deepened her appreciation for American democracy and inspires her ambition to build a better Connecticut.

From Sunrise Rotary and the YMCA to the Women's Business Development Council and the Adam J. Lewis Academy, Tooker's extensive volunteer work keeps her deeply connected to the local pulse. "Real insight comes from being in the community, not just talking about it," she says.

As a working mother of three, Tooker knows balance is more myth than reality, but also insists that it's sustainable over time. Raised in a dual-working household herself, she feels fortunate for a supportive partner and kids who are proud of her public service. "You learn that balance is about long-term equilibrium, not a perfect scale every day."

Jennifer Tooker's leadership is grounded in pragmatism, empathy, and steadfast optimism. Whether championing youth mental health, fostering civic participation, or planning for long-term safety infrastructure, her message remains clear and unwavering: *We can do better—and together, we will.*



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THE NORWALK CONSERVATORY: Shaping the Future of Performing Arts Education

By Jessica Hernandez with Ricky Loftus

The Norwalk Conservatory is more than a school; it's a launching pad for aspiring artists in musical theatre, television, and film. Committed to exceptional arts education, the Conservatory equips students with the skills and professional connections needed to thrive in the competitive entertainment industry.

The Conservatory's mission is clear: to provide outstanding arts education while fostering a strong local arts community. Faculty and staff connect students to real-world opportunities, bridging the gap between training and industry success.

The school began as a two-week program and quickly evolved into a semester-long course. Recognizing a gap in arts education, the founders sought to provide exposure to industry professionals in musical theatre, television, and film. While many institutions offered strong training, they often failed to connect students with influential figures who could launch their careers. The Norwalk Conservatory changed that by combining rigorous training with professional networking.

What sets The Norwalk Conservatory apart? Its faculty consists of active industry professionals, giving students direct access to auditions, feedback, and career opportunities. The program fosters a "working professional" mindset, allowing students to pursue career opportunities while in school, easing their transition into the industry.

The Conservatory offers three focused majors: Musical Theatre, Musical Theatre Dance, and Acting for Stage and Screen. Designed for students aged 18-22, these programs prepare them to enter the industry within two years. Students come from across the country, each bringing unique perspectives and talents. Whether they aim to refine performance skills, master dance, or delve into acting, the Conservatory provides a rigorous path to success.

One of the school's biggest advantages is direct mentorship from active professionals. Faculty members are immersed in the entertainment world, offering students personal guidance and valuable industry connections. This hands-on experience ensures that students develop their craft while forging relationships with key decision-makers. The Conservatory's

success is reflected in its students' achievements. Even before graduation, many students secure professional work. Victor De Paulo Rocha joins the original Broadway cast of *Stranger Things*, while Moriah Perry will tour with *The Wiz*. Other students have landed roles in television, film, and regional theatre, and some have signed contracts with cruise lines for production shows.

Beyond training performers, The Norwalk Conservatory is deeply committed to its local community. Each year, it produces three major shows, bringing Broadway-quality performances to the region. Students also participate in public events, partner with local organizations, and perform at senior care facilities, using their talents to spread joy and inspiration.

For the Conservatory, arts education is about more than technical skills. It fosters emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and a deeper understanding of humanity. This holistic approach enriches students both professionally and personally.

Looking ahead, the Conservatory has ambitious plans. Upcoming productions include *A Chorus Line* at The Klein Theatre in Bridgeport and *Peter and the Starcatcher*. The school also hosts a pre-college program, inspiring younger students and showcasing what they can achieve at the Conservatory. The community plays a vital role in supporting the Conservatory's mission. Attending performances helps fund future opportunities for students, and a new performance space is in development, promising even greater collaboration and growth. Visitors are encouraged to explore the school and learn how they can support the next generation of performing artists.

For anyone passionate about the arts, The Norwalk Conservatory offers a unique opportunity to be part of an exciting, dynamic institution. Whether as a student, community member, or supporter of the arts, the Conservatory is a place where creativity, dedication, and professional connections come together to shape the future of performing arts.



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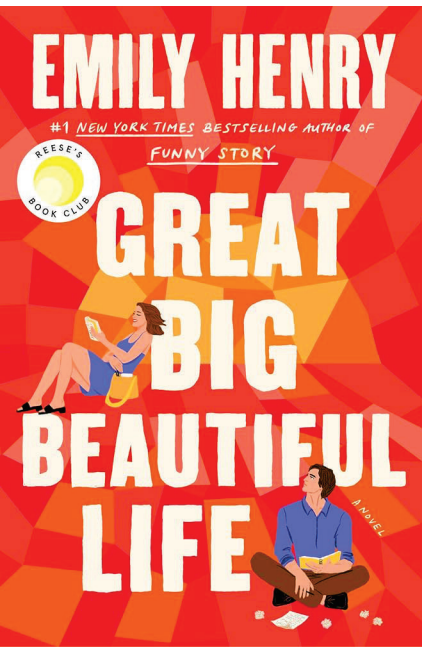
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BOOK REVIEW: THE GREAT BIG BEAUTIFUL LIFE BY EMILY HENRY

By Jessica Hernandez



Following along with Reese's Book Club has never felt more fulfilling.

Each month, I look forward to diving into a new story through Reese Witherspoon's Book Club, and when *The Great Big Beautiful Life* by Emily Henry was announced, I knew it would be something special. Emily Henry has a gift for crafting characters that feel heartbreakingly real. In this latest novel, she delivers a story that is at once tender, funny, raw, and emotionally expansive.

The book follows Lucy, a woman standing at a crossroads in life, forced to confront the grief of her past while learning to open her heart to possibility again. What makes this story so compelling isn't just the romance (although there is a beautiful, slow-burn relationship at its core) but the way Henry explores the messy, nuanced aspects of

being human, including grief, forgiveness, self-worth, and resilience.

Reading it as part of Reese's Book Club made the experience even more meaningful. I loved seeing the online community's reactions, the shared quotes, and the thoughtful discussions around healing and growth. It felt like we were all walking beside Lucy, rooting for her to find light again.

Henry's writing sparkles with wit and warmth, but it's the emotional honesty that truly lands. *The Great Big Beautiful Life* reminded me that even in our darkest seasons, beauty and connection can still be found and that sometimes, letting go is the bravest thing we can do.

If you're already a fan of Emily Henry, this book will deepen your love for her storytelling. And if you're new to Reese's Book Club, this is a perfect one to start with: raw, relatable, and utterly unforgettable.

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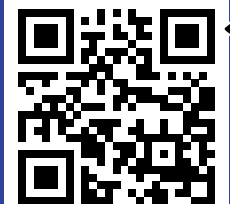
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FULL COURT PEACE DEEPENS ROOTS IN WESTPORT

By Jessica Hernandez with Mike Evans

For over a decade, Full Court Peace has quietly but powerfully engaged student-athletes in Fairfield County, particularly in Westport, as part of its mission to unite communities across socioeconomic divides through basketball and service. While its hands-on work takes place in underserved areas, from Bridgeport to the Bronx, Cuba to Puerto Rico, Westport continues to play an essential behind-the-scenes role in fueling this work.



Full Court Peace's decision to expand its engagement with Westport isn't new; it's the deepening of a long-standing relationship. For years, the nonprofit has maintained a student club at Staples High School, leveraging a population of talented athletes and engaged families who are eager to contribute to something larger than themselves.

"We've always had a presence in the suburbs," explains Mike Evans, founder of Full Court Peace. Westport has great kids and families who care about giving back. This year, we just wanted to do more to involve them directly."

Evans, who grew up in the neighboring town of Weston, understands the realities of life in affluent communities and how that privilege can be harnessed for a greater purpose.

"I look for kids who understand they've had it a little easier. The kind of kids who know it's time to give back and don't expect anything in return. And honestly, it's been easy to find those kids."

Many of these students are discovered through Evans' private coaching business, which serves numerous families in



Westport. These personal connections often evolve into deeper involvement with Full Court Peace's programming.

While the nonprofit doesn't run programming directly in Westport, local students are regularly involved in service trips abroad. In May, a group of Westport youth traveled to the Dominican Republic. In June, another team went to Puerto Rico. Their mission? Repairing basketball courts, restoring baseball fields, and donating vital sports equipment.

"Our kids do six hours of physical labor every day on these trips," Evans says. "They're not tourists. They're contributors."

The impact is both tangible and personal. Westport students like

Micah Turner

and Jasper Robinson, both rising ninth graders, have taken multiple trips and have independently started collecting sneakers and basketballs throughout the year to bring with them next time.

"They've internalized what it means always to be thinking about others who have less," Evans reflects. "That's the kind of growth we're looking for."

One of the most meaningful aspects of Full Court Peace's work is how it fosters relationships, not just through service, but through connection.

"We bring Westport kids into the communities we serve, Bridgeport, Norwalk, and the Bronx. They meet the local leaders. They listen. And then they take action based on what they've heard."

This people-first approach reinforces empathy. The organization doesn't want kids to see under-

served communities as abstract places to "help," but rather as homes to real people with names, stories, and aspirations.

Basketball is a vehicle — but it's not the end goal.

"Playing with someone on a court you helped repair is different from just dropping off donations. It creates wholeness," Evans explains. "It's about recognizing that what you have, a safe court, good sneakers, working basketballs, is a gift you can now pass on."

In Westport, courts like those at Compo Beach are pristine. Many students begin to realize that what they take for granted is out of reach for others, even in nearby towns.





This realization is key. "Success in Westport isn't about how many balls we collect or dollars we raise. It's about hearing kids say, 'How's that guy we met in Bridgeport doing?' It's when they remember names. When they want to follow up."

Westport's parent base has provided consistent financial support and donated equipment year after year. Through fund-raising events, such as free-throw contests and collection drives at local schools, families have helped sustain Full Court Peace's international initiatives, particularly in Cuba, where the organization has built strong relationships over the past three years.

Over 100 Westport families have traveled with us to Cuba. There's a real bond forming there," Evans says. "Because of that commitment, we can promise more to our partners in Cuba, we can grow the work."

While the organization's foundation remains rooted in international and urban outreach, the next big step will take Full Court Peace deeper into the U.S. heartland. "We're planning a trip next year to work with Native American communities in Wyoming. We started there in 2019 and continue to grow each year. We're now adding lacrosse to our outreach with the Natives. It's time our kids also understand the needs that exist within our borders."

Through it all, Westport continues to be a vital part of Full Court Peace's mission. It's where the resources come from, but more importantly, it's where a generation of compassionate, action-minded youth is being raised.

For more information, visit <https://www.full-courtpeace.org/> or follow along on Instagram at <https://www.instagram.com/fullcourtpeace/>



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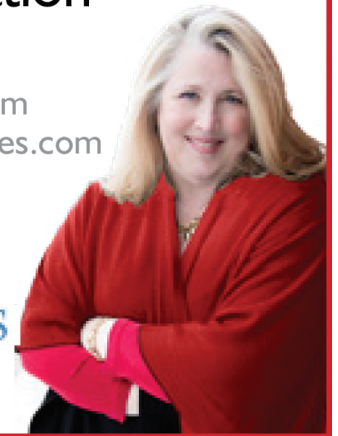
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JENA WIDER LEADS STAPLES GIRLS' TENNIS WITH PURPOSE AND PASSION

By Jessica Hernandez

In the highly competitive world of high school athletics, success is often measured in championships and titles. But for Jena Wider, Varsity Girls Tennis Coach at Staples High School, success is also defined by something more profound: character, resilience, and growth. Now entering her fifth season at the helm of one of Connecticut's top tennis programs, Coach Wider brings both competitive experience and a strong sense of purpose to the court.

A former New York State tennis champion and Division I squash player, Wider understands the discipline required to compete at a high level. She was recruited to play Division III tennis but ultimately chose to attend a Division I school where she continued her athletic journey on the squash team. That background, paired with a love for coaching, makes her uniquely positioned to mentor and motivate her players both on and off the court.

Ask Coach Wider what the key to Staples Girls Tennis' sustained success is, and she'll tell you it's all about "hard work and consistent practices." That dedication has paid off. Under her leadership, the team has become a powerhouse in the state, competing fiercely in the highly competitive FCIAC. "Playing our top rivals in the FCIAC is always exciting," says Wider. "But it's the consistency in our training that prepares us for those big matches."

Those big moments have been plentiful. Among them are Karennia Birns and Audrey Kercher, who captured the 2023 State Doubles Championship, and most recently, the team finished second in the state this year after an exciting run to the finals, where they ultimately fell to Greenwich. These achievements are a testament to the team's talent—but also to its coach's steady hand and ability to keep players mentally focused and emotionally balanced.

When a tough loss happens, Coach Wider knows precisely how to reframe it. "As long as they've played their best tennis, it's a win in my book," she says. "It's much better to lose playing your heart out than lose playing it safe."



She views each match, whether won or lost, as an opportunity to impart life lessons: perseverance, emotional resilience, and the importance of mental toughness. "Athletic skill can be matched," she notes, "but 80% of success comes down to how mentally tough a player is."

Coach Wider sees her role as more than just preparing athletes for competition. She embraces her responsibility as a mentor during one of the most formative times in her players' lives.

"High school is such a pivotal time," she says. "By senior year, they're becoming young adults. I feel lucky to be part of that transformation."

One of her proudest moments came recently, not from a trophy or championship, but from a phone call. A former player reached out from college to say the tennis team was the best part of her high school experience—and that the stress management techniques Coach Wider shared had become invaluable tools in her college life.

"That call meant everything," Wider says. "It showed me that the lessons we teach here go far beyond tennis."

As she looks to the future, Coach Wider hopes her legacy will be one of fostering personal growth, not just athletic achievement.

"I want to instill positive character traits and life skills that these girls can take with them wherever they go," she says. "And most importantly, I want them to have fun. For many, this may be their last time on a competitive team. I want them to work hard, be proud of their efforts, and enjoy every minute."

With that balanced approach, fierce focus on the court, and a nurturing spirit off it, Jena Wider is not only building a winning program at Staples. She's shaping future leaders, one serve and one lesson at a time.

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HISTORY CORNER

NIKE MISSILE SITES

By Mike Allen | Photos courtesy of Mike Allen

Underground missile silos in Fairfield?

Most people are unaware that anti-aircraft missile sites protected two Connecticut cities during the Cold War with Russia after World War II.

From 1950 to 1970, nuclear weapons were delivered by airplanes – not by intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) as they are today. So, for protection you had to be able to shoot down incoming airplanes.

The U.S. military deemed 40 American cities as critical to defend, including two in Connecticut. Bridgeport had many armaments manufacturing facilities; greater Hartford was home to Pratt & Whitney as well as the insurance industry that supported the overall economy.



During the 1950s, the Russians had relatively few long-range bombers. The thought was that they would send just one plane to drop a nuclear bomb. The military developed six sites that “ringed” Bridgeport and another six around Hartford. These 12 sites were outfitted with Nike Ajax

ballistic missiles (not nuclear warheads). The missiles were placed in underground silos.

The sites protecting Bridgeport were in Fairfield, Westport, Monroe, Milford, West Haven, and Ansonia.

Each site had two parts: one for the underground silos and, about a mile away, the control room where crews would remotely adjust the missile’s trajectory after launch using sophisticated radar.



The Fairfield Ajax missile silos were located at today’s Sullivan Field on Old Dam Road, while the remote-control location was at today’s animal control and regional fire school building site on Richard White Way. They operated throughout the 1950s.

The Ajax missiles had a range of 25 miles. They would blow up the Russian plane before it could deliver its payload. Of course, the missile would likely detonate the nuclear bomb onboard the Russian plane, spewing radiation through the air. It was felt that an in-air explosion, 25 miles away, was better than a Russian nuclear bomb dropped precisely on its target.

By the 1960s, Russian air power had improved to the point where the U.S. believed multiple Russian planes would stage bombing raids in convoys. So, the U.S. closed nine Ajax missile sites (including Fairfield) and outfitted the remaining three with Nike Hercules nuclear missiles. The idea was that a nuclear missile, with a range of 75 miles, would explode in front of the Russian convoy destroying all incoming planes. Of course, significant amounts of radiation would result when the U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons detonated.

The one site protecting Bridgeport that was upgraded to nuclear missiles was in Ansonia. The two sites around Hartford that got nuclear missiles were in Cromwell and East Windsor. Most people didn’t know about it then and relatively few people know about it even today.

Mike Allen is the host and producer of the weekly podcast Amazing Tales from Off and On Connecticut’s Beaten Path. You can find the 150+ episodes at his website, www.AmazingTalesCT.com and also see his weekly episode teasers each Thursday on his Facebook page @AmazingTalesCT.

WESTPORT POLICE SUPPORT LEGISLATIVE ACTION ON E-BIKE SAFETY AND REGULATION

By Lieutenant Anthony Prezioso

The Westport Police Department is pleased to see our state’s legislators take action to address what has quickly developed into a safety and accountability issue for our and neighboring communities. Electric bicycle technology has rapidly evolved over the last few years, certainly creating the need for a synchronous change in regulatory legislation that has unfortunately lagged a bit behind the rate of innovation.

Although our agency continues to advocate for an education over an enforcement-based approach as it relates to the use of this technology, as

evidenced by our recent e-bike town hall forum, the reality is that before these changes take effect, officers have been somewhat limited in terms of mechanisms for enforcement, even in situations that would warrant such action. The reclassification of certain bikes to require a licensed operator as well as the implementation of registration and insurance requirements will certainly help to better regulate their use, especially among young people. We continue to strongly encourage parents to research the product they plan to purchase for their child thoroughly before doing so, as it has



become quite clear from our officers’ encounters that many are unaware of the various classifications and capabilities of these machines.

Again, we are pleased to see our legislators address this evolving issue and believe these changes are a step in the right direction toward promoting public safety in this arena.

THE IRS COLLECTION PROCESS

By Michael O'Leary, EA, NTPI Fellow

What do you do after you receive your first collection notice from the IRS?

Sit down, take a deep breath, and call a tax professional. My practice handles collection cases frequently, and I can assist you.

It is helpful to understand how the IRS Collection Process works. Here's a brief overview:

- Once a tax return is filed and processed by the IRS, the tax is assessed.
- Then, a collection letter is sent asking for payment.
- If payment is not received right away, a "silent lien" is issued, and the collection letters become more aggressive.
- If you owe more than \$10,000 and still haven't paid, the IRS will file a "Notice of Federal Tax Lien," which destroys your credit rating.
- If you continue to ignore them, then they begin "levying" your assets. A levy is an actual "taking," such as cleaning out your bank account or having your employer garnish your wages.



How do you make this nightmare go away?

In three words: compliance, communication, and resolution.

- Compliance means getting current on filing your tax returns.
- Communication means reaching out to the IRS to inform them that you want to resolve this issue. As an Enrolled Agent (EA), I am admitted to practice before the IRS on behalf of clients on all tax matters.
- Resolution means establishing a workable installment payment plan to pay off your outstanding balance.

If you have any questions or need help, call me at 203-434-5626 or email me at mikeo24@bythebooktaxes.net. Also, visit my website at www.bythebooktaxes.net

Michael O'Leary, EA, NTPI Fellow
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