

Connecticut Magazine 40 Under 40!

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Photos by Bob Grier Photography

If you're worried about Connecticut's future, you'll probably feel better after visiting with the people on these pages—nominated for inclusion by their co-workers, neighbors, business associates and even family members. We hope you gain as much encouragement from meeting them as we did.



Stacey Violante Cote • 39 • Canton

Stacey Cote, now director of the Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic at The Center for Children's Advocacy in Hartford, has been with the center for 10 years. She advocates for teens struggling against tremendous odds—neglect, abuse, homelessness—helping to improve their lives. She is also the lead attorney for the Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Project, where she works tirelessly to protect newcomers from perils such as homelessness and sex trafficking. Cote also chairs the Connecticut Team for Runaway and Homeless Youth. She was instrumental in helping pass legislation that requires police to notify the Department of Children and Families when they arrest a youth involved in prostitution. (One in three runaways is lured into sex trafficking within 48 hours of leaving home.)



Ryan Bingham • 29 • Torrington

When he was elected mayor of Torrington in 2005 at the age of 22—thus becoming the youngest mayor in the history of the state and still living in his mother's basement—Ryan Bingham made headlines across the nation. The son and grandson of former members of the state legislature (both his mother and grandfather represented Torrington), Bingham has emerged as a political force in his own right and continues to make headlines, winning a second two-year term in 2007 and, in 2009, winning the first four-year mayoral term in city history. He has also helped to lead efforts to revitalize downtown Torrington and has used social media to keep constituents in the loop, regularly Tweeting from meetings, his office and around town.



Deremius Williams • 37 • North Haven

Deremius Williams is a born leader. At Anthem Blue Cross/Blue Shield she holds the position of executive director of provider network management. But her tireless philanthropic work for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society sets her apart from the pack. In 2011, she earned the organization's Woman of the Year award, which pitted her against other fundraisers across the country dedicated to helping children with blood cancer. Williams raised more than \$32,000 for the cause. She also sings with the Brothers and Sisters of Christ gospel group and is a board member of Leadership of Greater Hartford.



Rory D.L. Moorer • 34 • Higganum

When author and illustrator Tomie dePaola saw illustrator and painter Rory Moorer's work, he called him one of the most talented young artists he'd ever seen. Since then, the contemporary artist has won multiple awards for his work, which has been exhibited in galleries around the country. But Moorer's most recent work illustrates his views about the human condition. His desire "to make good art accessible to the community" has prompted him to get involved with a number of charitable endeavors, like painting murals for the Meriden downtown revitalization project. Last year, he opened the impressive Gallore Gallery in Middletown, where he hopes to help promote emerging artists while continuing to donate his talents to worthy causes.

Nicole Macey • 30 • Enfield

Nicole Macey took a job with Travelers Insurance right out of college and never looked back. She started out working in various units in the company, including a two-year stint as executive assistant to Chairman and CEO Jay Fishman, and is now director of finance—international development, representing the company in London, Ireland, Brazil and Canada. But Macey is also accomplished in other ways. She participates in the Big Brother Big Sister program, and spends a week of her summer vacation each year volunteering at The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in Ashford, founded by Paul Newman for children with cancer and other life-threatening diseases.

Emily Byrne • 30 • New Haven

As the founding director and developer of New Haven Promise, Emily Byrne helped to create an innovative college-scholarship program that provides tuition assistance to students who wouldn't normally have the resources needed for higher education. Following the initial success of that program, Byrne—a former deputy chief of staff for New Haven Mayor John DeStefano—was tagged by new state Education Commissioner Stefan Pryor to be director of strategic initiatives, among other things helping set policy and determine legislation that will aid Connecticut in its quest to improve education for all students. As she says, "There's no better wealth creator, crime-prevention plan or economic-development initiative than ensuring that kids—our future—get an excellent and equal education."

Mari Rebane-Mazzotta • 37 • Middletown

Plastic surgeon Rebane-Mazzotta, who hails from Estonia, recently opened Middlesex Plastic Surgery Center, a private practice in Middletown where she offers cosmetic procedures, reconstructive surgery and treatment for facial and extremity trauma. But Rebane-Mazzotta also uses her exceptional skills to help those in need. She has traveled to Haiti to repair cleft lips and palates, as well as to Ecuador on a mission to treat children with a variety of problems including craniosynostosis, ear deformities, cleft lips and palates. She says, "I am still looking for avenues where I can contribute my time in Connecticut."

Slava Frayter • 39 • Cos Cob

Frayter came to Connecticut 13 years ago from Latvia with his wife and two small children. He spoke no English and didn't have a job, but with a young family he had no time to waste. He moved furniture at an antiques store, then worked in a warehouse. During lunch breaks he taught himself English. In 2000, he was hired as a shipping manager by Newtec, an international satellite communication firm based in Belgium. It was the opportunity he'd been waiting for. He quickly rose through the ranks and now is a vice president in charge of Newtec America, where they describe him as "a great colleague, team player and manager." American dream? Check.

Brendan Muldowney • 30 • Fairfield

Brendan Muldowney, chief engineer at well-known Carriage House Studios in Stamford, has been nominated for a Grammy Award this year in the category of "Best Engineered Album (nonclassical)" for his work on *The Next Right Thing* by Seth Glier. Muldowney says, "I knew I wanted to make records for a living the day I first heard *Dark Side of the Moon* by Pink Floyd." He began learning about the music business wrapping cables as a studio assistant at New York City recording studios, but it wasn't long before he was developing a reputation of his own as a top engineer. He's worked with John Scofield, Johnny Winter, Derek Trucks, Susan Tedeschi, Dave Brubeck, Wayne Krantz and Diana Ross. "I always remember that it's the artist's record we're making," he says. "It's my goal to bring out the absolute best in each one of them."

Roger Wierbicki • 36 • East Hartford

Wierbicki's early business career was brushed with glamour—during his undergraduate years at Central Connecticut State University he interned for the PolyGram Label Group and Island Records and worked for Bon Jovi Management during the 1995-96 "These Days" Tour. Later, he was employed with the New Jersey Nets during the team's 2001-02 and 2002-03 NBA Finals runs. Currently, as director of sales at DATTCO Bus Co. in New Britain—where he was the leading student sales representative from 2003 to 2011—he helps clients fulfill their travel needs by managing one- and multi-day tours and international travel.

Jason S. Andrews • 34 • Stamford

In nominating him for "40 Under 40," clients of Jason Andrews, a Chartered Retirement Planning Counselor and founding member of The Cutler & Andrews Financial Group at Wells Fargo Advisors in Old Greenwich, cite his integrity, work ethic and client care. Prior to joining Wells Fargo, he was vice president—investments at UBS Financial Services, where he developed retirement-planning strategies for real estate professionals. In addition to working one-on-one with clients, he lectures on finance and investing. His message? With so much information out there—he deplores "information overload" that creates "paralysis by analysis"—he's committed to doing his part to demystify financial planning for the layperson.

Denise M. Gallucci • 36 • Avon

Since coming to Connecticut in 2007 to become the deputy executive director of the Capitol Region Education Council

[CREC] and the superintendent of CREC schools, Denise Gallucci has had a positive impact on thousands of students who attend 15 magnet schools in Greater Hartford. Her efforts have helped CREC to significantly narrow the achievement gap in the region; more than 95 percent of CREC magnet school students graduating high school now go on to higher education. Also thanks to Gallucci's influence, numerous schools in her jurisdiction have also been recognized nationally for their achievements.

Kara Sundlun • 37 • Hartford

Kara Sundlun has become a welcome midday fixture on WFSB Channel 3, both as anchor of "Eyewitness News at Noon" and co-host of "Better Connecticut" at 3 p.m. Since joining WFSB in 2000, she has covered many of the major stories in the state, from 9/11 to Tropical Storm Irene, garnering two Emmy awards for outstanding achievement in reporting along the way. When she's not behind a TV news desk, she is out and about in Hartford with her husband (and WFSB news co-anchor) Dennis House, often participating in or hosting many, many charity events for local causes.

Peter Sena • 28 • New Haven

As technology creeps deeper into our everyday lives, geek has become increasingly chic. Riding that wave is Peter Sena, self-proclaimed "Master of the Interwebz" and founder of Digital Surgeons, a digital marketing agency that in seven years has gone from a one-man side business to a heralded technology group with more than 20 employees. When Sena isn't creating digital and traditional marketing campaigns and products for national clients such as Ovation Guitars and Lady Gaga, he's volunteering with New Haven United Way, Greater New Haven Community Foundation, ACES and other charities.

Jay N. Hershman • 35 • Cheshire

Real estate attorney Jay Hershman was a shoo-in for this honor. In the words of his partner, Donald S. Baillie, what sets him apart is his dedication, not only to his clients—"working long hours and always going above and beyond to make sure their needs are being met"—but to his community. Jay has been a devoted member of the Cheshire Volunteer Fire Department since he was 16, "responding to fire calls at all hours of the day and night—weekends and holidays included." He has risen to the rank of assistant chief, and is president of the Waterbury Area Fire Chiefs Association.

Jason Guberman-Pfeffer • 24 • Stratford

Meet Renaissance man Jason Guberman-Pfeffer. The summa cum laude Sacred Heart grad (in three years) and class president has clearly demonstrated book smarts and people smarts. While still an undergrad he was invited to present at faculty panels; in his spare time he organized a concert promoting solidarity with Iranian dissidents. Today he's a social entrepreneur—founder/guiding force behind the Diarna Project, which provides free virtual access to historic Jewish sites from Morocco to Iran. Enhancing oral and visual histories with today's technology, e.g., Google Earth, and staffed by an ecumenical team, Diarna may well become a model for historical and community preservation projects worldwide. On top of all this, he's an accomplished pianist.

Eleanora Tornatore-Mikesh • 37 • Wilton

She's almost doubled the family business over the past 10 years. What's interesting is that the business is The Greens at Cannondale, an assisted-living community in Wilton with 140 residents and 100 full-time employees. As executive director, Eleanora Tornatore-Mikesh has grown it financially (from \$7 million to \$12 million a year); as a trained gerontologist, she's developed The Evergreen Program, an innovative Alzheimer's and dementia program, and drawn in the community by opening a dementia support group to the public and organizing seminars with Danbury and Norwalk hospitals. A leader in her field—she's board chair for the Connecticut Assisted Living Association—she's lauded for her "leadership, innovative thinking and compassion."

Kinga Evans • 30 • Bristol

Evans is no shrinking violet. She'd never ventured outside her small native village in Eastern Poland until at age 18, she moved to the U.S. to attend college. After graduating from Central Connecticut State University and earning an M.B.A. from the University of Hartford, she went to work in the call center at insurance giant The Hartford, despite English being her second language. "This typifies her can-do attitude," says her husband, David. "She excelled, winning customer-service awards and quickly being promoted—over eight years she worked in every department imaginable." Today Evans brings her energy to Webster Bank, where she's vice president of strategy. She also serves on the board of Meriden's Cove Center for Grieving Children.

Jennifer M.F. Hillgen-Santa • 38 • Stratford

Civic-minded Jennifer Hillgen-Santa makes a difference in the world, starting in her own hometown. After earning a law degree, she was elected to the Stratford Town Council, where she acted as a community builder and a trusted resource for residents, many of whom weren't even her constituents. She left her mark on numerous town projects before exiting politics in 2005 to join her husband, Michael, in the Hillgen-Santa Financial Group, LLC. Her good work continues as a

board member of the State of Connecticut Department of Public Health, as a teacher at Fairfield University's Graduate School of Business, as pro bono counsel for the Animal Cancer Foundation and as a volunteer at her daughter's school.

Isabel Carrington • 36 • New Hartford

As director of education for the Warner Theatre in Torrington, Isabel Carrington has been a whirlwind advocate for the arts in northwest Connecticut. She manages the theater's Center for Arts Education, which includes dance, music, visual, technical and writing arts, as well as artist-in-residence programs for area schools. But her participation goes deeper than that. She is the instructor for advanced high school acting classes and has directed 18 Young Actors Series productions for the Warner's Main Stage. She's even written two original full-length plays for the students to perform. Bravo!

Christi Holmes • 36 • New Haven

As director of the Connecticut State Medical Society Health Equity Campaign, Christi Holmes has made it her mission to reduce the racial and ethnic disparities in delivery of medical care caused by language barriers and other cultural differences. In 2008 she launched a research study to assess Connecticut doctors' intercultural competencies. The results led to a program, Care in Context, which provides continuing-education credit to physicians as incentive to improve doctor-patient communication and create a more fair and balanced health-care system. Introduced during grand rounds at 15 Connecticut hospitals, the program has received high marks from participating doctors and garnered national attention: Holmes now serves on the National Commission to End Health Care Disparities and was invited to present a paper at the American Medical Association's House of Delegates last summer.

Buddy Prete • 39 • Milford

President of his own flooring company—Ultimate Interiors—since 1992, when he was a Fairfield University undergrad, Buddy Prete is the model of a modern small-business booster. He's on the board of Milford Progress Inc., belongs to the Milford Chamber of Commerce and is a member of the Downtown Milford Business Association. High school pal Jeanne Jamieson praises his business savvy: "Over the years, Buddy has managed to grow his business while competing with the big-box stores," she says. "His personal service, attention to detail and desire to provide a quality product have taken him far."

Roxanne Melaragno • 34 • Fairfield

Roxanne Melaragno is one of a new generation of teachers who contribute much more to their schools than simply standing in front of a classroom. According to Christopher Geissler, principal of Middle Gate Elementary School in Newtown, where she teaches, "Roxanne is an intelligent teacher-leader and valuable member of our school system. She works hard to further the district's goals, improve her craft and ensure success for all students. Currently, she's co-chair of our Early Intervention Team, mentor for the TEAM program and a member of the Teaching and Learning Subcommittee of our District Strategic Planning Committee. She has made many contributions to education, and her ability to relate with students and guide their learning is equally impressive."

David Klineberg • 33 • New Haven

Want to increase awareness of your product or move merchandise off the shelf? New Haven's Response LLC, a marketing firm where David Klineberg is vice president of client services, is one place to check out. At Response, Klineberg is responsible for overseeing the client management team and helping develop a strategic vision for clients. He also founded the country's first "crowdsourced" sports franchise, the Torrington Titans baseball team, before selling it last year. A further sideline, and fandom, has led him to a consulting role for the digital and social-media presence of Grammy Award-winning singer-songwriter Van Hunt.

Marisa Balletti-Lavoie • 28 • Meriden

Balletti-Lavoie started Sassy Mouth Photography four years ago as a way to "bring art, love and much sassiness to the masses." The masses seem to approve: Her business—devoted mostly to family and wedding photography—has grown by leaps and bounds. She has a thriving studio in downtown Meriden, and last season shot 40 weddings. Balletti-Lavoie also donates her time and talent to the Connecticut Science Center in Hartford, doing the photography for all its fundraisers and offering free photo shoots as prizes.

Jason Van Stone • 36 • Waterbury

Van Stone seems to be succeeding mightily at the art of combining long days at work with a wide array of political and community activities in his hometown. By day, he's the director of marketing for Waterbury-based OptiCare Eye Health & Vision Centers, which has 18 locations in Connecticut. His very active role the rest of the time includes serving on the board of education, charter revision commission, neighborhood associations and even as chairman of the Waterbury Republican Town Committee. What Van Stone seems to get completely is that his sort of civic-mindedness is critical if Connecticut's cities are to survive and thrive in the future.

Beth Collins • 38 • Guilford

Dr. Beth Collins has quite the pedigree—the Connecticut native is a graduate of University College Dublin Medical School, is double board-certified (in general surgery and plastic and reconstructive surgery), is affiliated with the Yale School of Medicine's Department of Plastic Surgery and Saint Raphael's, and won a coveted prize for her research in breast reconstruction and body contouring. Since opening her practice in Guilford just two years ago (her father, Raymond Ippolito, is a shoreline surgeon), she's also added a medical spa, performed breast reconstructions on uninsured women and supported local breast-cancer fundraisers. Most important, she's won kudos from patients for her extraordinary skill, caring and concern. The favorite parts of her work? "Patient interaction and working with residents," she says. "Actually, I love everything about my work—I'm very lucky."

Paul Paris Jr. • 36 • Norwich

With entrepreneurial drive and a passion for green building, Paul Paris Jr. started ZeroDraft Insulation LLC in 2001 out of his parents' basement when he was only 26; today the company, with offices in Waterford, Bridgeport and Torrington, has 65 employees and is on track to top \$5 million in sales (from energy audits, spray-foam insulation, etc.). He's done numerous retrofits for the Connecticut Energy Efficiency Fund (CEEF), one of the first five state contractors licensed to do so. "I'm passionate about helping Connecticut residents—from the low-income, disabled and elderly to the '1 percenters'—save money on energy and reduce their carbon footprint," he says. "I take pride in being an innovator and pioneer in the green-building field."

Jessica Hazan • 39 • Hamden

What do you do when friends tell you, "I would pay you to cook for my family"? If you're Jessica Hazan, you open up your own business called The Soup Girl and deliver homemade soups to customers near your Hamden home. Hazan's entrepreneurial spirit came alive after she and her young family moved up from New York and she took time off from teaching to be a full-time mom—well, not quite full-time. That's when she started making soup in large batches (roasted beet bisque has become a special favorite) and The Soup Girl was born. This month, the story grows with the opening of a retail location on Whitney Avenue in Hamden next to her sister Erica O'Brien's cake shop.

Daniel Meiser • 33 • Mystic

At 33, Daniel Meiser has already carved out more of a career in the Connecticut restaurant business than others accomplish in a lifetime. A graduate of the French Culinary Institute in Manhattan, he landed an internship and subsequent job with renowned chef Daniel Boulud before returning to Connecticut to join the Max Restaurant Group. He soon made his way up the ranks to become the organization's youngest general manager; following that tenure, he was instrumental in opening Hartford's critically acclaimed eatery Firebox. His latest endeavor is the "farm and sea to table"-themed Oyster Club in Mystic, of which he is co-owner and general manager and which opened late last year to rave reviews.

Dina Mariani • 28 • Wilton

Watching hopelessly as your father lost his life to blood cancer when you were only 14 would be devastating for anyone, but it also steeled Dina Mariani's resolve to spend her life working to help find a cure. As deputy executive director of Wilton's Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, Connecticut Chapter, over the last two-and-a-half years she's raised the society's local profile by creating three events—an authors' luncheon, 5K road race, and Hops & Grapes, a food, wine and beer tasting—that have resulted in a 38 percent net gain in charitable donations. "More importantly, we are now servicing many more blood-cancer patients in the Connecticut area," says chapter Executive Director Jeannie Montano.

Veronica DeLandro • 35 • New Britain

The colleague who nominated Veronica DeLandro for this honor describes her as a "dynamic young professional with outstanding quality and true commitment to her community." We concur. In her professional life DeLandro is program director for College Summit CT, a nonprofit organization that helps school districts increase their college enrollment rates. When she's not at work, she's busy serving on the boards of the John E. Rogers African American Cultural Center and the Hartford Area Habitat for Humanity, as well as playing a key role at the Granville Academy Mentor Program at ESPN, which she founded.

Alison Fischer • 37 • Westport

The bridal business can be tough and highly competitive, with only a few shops making it big. Alison Fischer's The Plumed Serpent, in Westport, is one of them. After picking up fashion experience with Nicole Miller and Ralph Lauren, Fischer set out on her own with a small prom-dress shop. Following a major makeover in 2007, she now presides over a 3,000-square-foot salon where brides-to-be, family and friends can view and choose from Oscar de la Renta, Monique Lhuillier, Anne Barge, Carolina Herrera and many others, along with bridesmaid and mother-of-the-occasion lines.

Andrew J. Lee • 39 • Glastonbury

Andrew Lee is a vice president at Aetna, where he leads hospitalist solutions; he previously served as chief of staff in the

Aetna president's office. He's passionate about his work—increasing value in health care—and also about bringing equity to Native Americans: As a newly minted master in public policy from Harvard's Kennedy School, he headed the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development (USA Weekend profiled him as one of seven "Native American Standouts" in 2007). One of 36 North Americans designated a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum, he's seen as, and sees himself as, someone who works across diverse communities to bridge differences—and make a difference—for the betterment of society as a whole.

Jamie Jones • 35 • Shelton

In 1999, Philip Jamison "Jamie" Jones, a sixth-generation farmer, planted the first vines that would be the foundation of Jones Winery, a successful addition to the 164-year-old Jones Family Farms. Since then, Jones and the winery have gone on to win accolades—including this magazine's Best Connecticut Wine in 2010 and 2011—while bringing the family name to a new group of consumers. Jones is also first vice president of the Connecticut Farm Bureau, president of the Connecticut Vineyard and Winery Association, and last year was appointed by the governor to the Governor's Council for Agricultural Development.

Jason J. Giulietti • 31 • Somers

Like many of the up-and-comers on this list, Jason Giulietti wears many hats. His professional title is director of alumni relations for the University of Connecticut Health Center, but his volunteer contributions and titles demonstrate his passion and dedication to the community: He is president of the board of directors of the New England Economic Partnership; president of the alumni board of directors for the Department of Public Policy at UConn; and former president of the board of directors of the Hartford Area Business Economists. He also has served on the boards of the Hartford Club, the New England Public Policy Center and the Greater Hartford chapter of the UConn Alumni Association. In his "spare" time, he finds time to mentor high school and college students.

Stephanie Bendiske Klewicki • 39 • East Hampton

A speech and language pathologist and board-certified behavior analyst, Klewicki envisions a future for special-needs children in which they realize their full potential. To that end, in 2009 she established the Children's Advancement Fund Inc. (CAF), which assists families of children with autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, learning disorders and other disabilities in accessing medical therapies, social skills training and community programs. CAF's need-based financial assistance often permits families to stay with their current therapy providers, ensuring continuity of care. Klewicki has also developed a social skills program, offered through CAF, to help children learn how to interact more effectively at home, in school and in their communities. Says one nominator: "[Stephanie] doesn't even want to take the small salary allotted her by the CAF board. She really is the heart of the organization."

Ali Parmelee • 36 • New Haven

Ali Parmelee is a strategist, social media specialist and co-owner of Think Creative Group, a website, marketing and branding firm she started with a partner in 2004. The group's clients include the Yale Department of Surgery, Santa Energy and Long Wharf Theatre. Parmelee and company volunteer their marketing services to the American Red Cross, and recently initiated "Do Good. Think Big," a contest for nonprofits that awards an online branding strategy. She's also a passionate animal-rights supporter, and rescued a boxer/pitbull nine years ago, who is now her constant companion.

Nick Lloyd • 37 • New Haven

Recording engineer, musician and entrepreneur Nick Lloyd took a deteriorating New Haven firehouse, turned it into his personal pastime, and in the process brought new, needed life to an area of New Haven. Lloyd's Firehouse 12 is now a high-tech recording studio by day and a cutting-edge jazz club at night. Local up-and-comers and accomplished jazz masters perform on most Friday nights. Patrons travel from Boston and New York City to attend concerts here, and the reviews are stellar. Add to the mix Lloyd's critically acclaimed Firehouse 12 Records label, which he co-founded with Taylor Ho Bynum, as well as the upstairs loft he shares with his family, and we'd say Nick Lloyd has achieved the American dream—or at the very least the New Haven dream.