Passing of the Torch

With new ownership, the Chez sees revived energy more than 40 years after its founding.

ALSO INSIDE:
- The challenges in being black and transgender
- Pride celebrations throughout the state
- "Radicals in Miniature" comes to Arts & Ideas festival
- Centerline: A New Beginning

Former Chez owner Bryan Couzens, left, sold the bar to John Pepe, center, and husband Luis.
In This Issue

Transgender AND Black
It’s difficult to be in a population that is often times marginalized. But what issues arise when you’re doubly so? Marlon Winbush shares on Page 4.

A Revival at the Chez
New owners John and Luis Pepe are breathing new life into the Chez, with the help of former owner Bryan Couzens. Learn about their progress on Page 8.

Pride Statewide
20 years ago, Connecticut Pride expanded to include three festival locations. We look at where those three events are today, as well as other events, on Page 14.

‘Radicals’ Ideas
The International Festival of Arts & Ideas will host “Radicals in Miniature,” which includes LGBTQ+ themes, this year. Performance details are on Page 22.
Welcome to Centerline, a magazine for the LGBTQ+ community in Connecticut. We’re excited to kick things off as pride month is in full swing.

Since the folding of Metroline, a publication with four decades of history covering the state and serving in some ways as a publication of record for our community, there has not been much out there telling our stories and sharing our history. As someone who worked for Metroline during its final years, and having spent a portion of my career working in journalism, I still believe in the power of the written word, and that there should be a publication keeping track of our community.

Of course, a news publication, which was Metroline’s primary mission, is a somewhat dated format in the world we live in today, and Centerline will be published less frequently (Metroline was twice a month; Centerline will be every other month). As such, while some news stories will find their way here, we will be focusing on telling our community’s stories, documenting our history, and providing a space for members of our community to share their views.

Centerline is being published as a service of the New Haven Pride Center, an organization with which I’ve served as a board member for more than a decade. In the past year, programming has been flourishing under the leadership of Executive Director Patrick J Dunn, and he and I both wish to see the magazine grow with your input. After all, this is your magazine!

As such, we encourage you to email us at nhglcc@gmail.com, and share your thoughts:

- We welcome recommendations for topics of articles you’d like to see in the magazine.
- If you have an opinion piece you’d like to contribute to the magazine, we will have space for various viewpoints in each issue.
- We will be looking to work with writers and photographers to help us fill the pages! Stipends will be available for certain pieces, and credit will always be given for photos contributed or taken for Centerline.

As with anything new, the magazine will go through a somewhat experimental period as we find our footing and our voice. So also be sure to share with us your feedback of what you think of this issue, both your likes and dislikes, so we can fine-tune as we go.

We kick off our inaugural issue with a couple of articles that are both timely and relate to our community’s history. One is a look at the pride season, which has expanded from a single event in Hartford to a full summer of events across the state. The second is the recent ownership change at the Chez Est, a bar with more than 40 years of history that’s going through it’s latest revival. We also have a viewpoint from a person of color who is also trans, and a preview of a performance with LGBTQ+ themes coming to the International Festival of Arts & Ideas.

Thank you for picking up Centerline! We hope you enjoy the publication, and join us for this journey.
Why Being Transgender and Black is Such a Challenge

By Marlon Winbush

In recent years, members of the transgender community have been receiving greater representation. Though there needs to be more community acknowledgement, significant strides have been made to recognize the experience of transgender individuals. Each community represented within the LGBTQ acronym has its nuanced experiences creating particular life challenges. Challenges that typically characterize the transgender experience are: family disownment, loss of community reputation, and transphobia (which is sometimes inflicted by members of the gay/bisexual/lesbian communities more aggressively than heterosexuals).

We have yet to hear the public outcry of transgender people of color’s dismay. Being a member of a doubly marginalized group is often times unbearably stressful. Possessing dual identities that are generally looked at disparagingly from a societal standpoint has profound effects on the mental well-being of black transgender individuals. Could you imagine your experience creating a world where you feeling closed in from every area? Commonly, members of the black transgender community’s frequent unwelcomed experiences paint the picture of a world that is mostly drab.

The underlying cause for much of this can be found within the African American community’s rejection of transgender individuals due to cultural intolerance most of which stems from religious influence. Sadly, in the black community transgender members are often forgotten--or worse, abused in one way or another.

The first step in creating a better life for transgender African-Americans is for the public to be informed of their uniquely pressurized set of circumstances with three of them being: poverty, limited protection legal protection and health disparities.

POVERTY

The Human Rights Campaign reports that black transgender people “face severe rates of poverty, with 34 percent living in extreme poverty compared to just 9 percent of non-transgender Black people”. Additionally, a survey conducted by the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) reports that 42 percent of their black transgender respondents have experienced homelessness.

The widespread impoverishment of black transgender individuals has disturbing social implications. It is not uncommon to discover members of the community being exploited sexually due to their economic disadvantage. Take the lack of financial security and add to it the lack of physical security experienced in urban areas that are infected with blatant and aggressive forms of homophobia: black transgender individuals find themselves in a considerably tough spot.

LACK OF PROTECTION UNDER THE LAW

Reportedly 38 percent of black transgender individuals that have interacted with the
police have experienced harassment according to the Human Rights Campaign.

Victims of crime frequently face subsequent re-victimization when reporting acts of transphobia to members of law enforcement. Transgender discrimination experienced at the hand of police and other law enforcement agents potentiates perpetual victimhood as it creates suspicion in law enforcement as well as continual crimes committed by aggressors possessing awareness that their crimes will go unpunished.

Instances of discrimination committed against black transgender individuals by unsuspecting members of their communities such as law enforcement solidifies their insignificance.

**HEALTH DISPARITIES**

The NCTE reveals that 6.7 percent of their black transgender respondents were HIV positive (more than 20 times the rate in the U.S.). Often these individuals are unable to access adequate health care. Receiving inadequate medical attention places these individuals at a greater risk for the acceleration of their condition.

HIV positive individuals in this situation are also at increased risk of developing health problems secondary to HIV such as depression.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP**

Don’t ignore the numbers! There is vast history rooted in the particulars of the African American community that places many black transgender men and women in a precarious situation. Acknowledge that as members of the LGBT community we are all connected to one another and we have a responsibility to protect each other. Spread awareness of the issues frequently found in the African American transgender community and be sure to support initiatives to address these community issues.

**REFERENCES**


**Voice Therapy:**

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APNH Contacts:

📞 Main Switchboard: 203.624.0947
📞 Confidential Testing Line: 475.441.7020

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“This is autobiography disguised as séance, masquerading as eulogy, camouflaged as performance.”

The New York Times

RADICALS IN MINIATURE
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New Haven, Connecticut

From Obie Award-winning playwright Ain Gordon
Chez Est sees resurgence under newest ownership

Full calendar, venue upgrades among changes made by new owner John Pepe with help of former owner Bryan Couzens

More than 40 years after the Chez Est opened, things are still going strong. But a new energy has been infused into the bar with the recent change of ownership. Longtime owner Bryan Couzens recently sold the bar to husbands John and Luis Pepe, and they have been quickly implementing a series of changes designed to carry the Chez forward, while still respecting its history as an LGBTQ+ bar.

Centerline editor-in-chief Joshua O’Connell recently interviewed John Pepe about the changes and what those who haven’t been in awhile can expect.

What’s your memories and history of the Chez?

Bryan [Couzens] and I went to the Chez on New Years Eve 1994. It was the first time I had ever set foot in the building. I remember the Chez was
always busy and it felt like the party never ended. Everyone was always having a great time especially because there was always something going on. Little did we know that Bryan would end up managing and later owning the bar. I always remember Bryan having passion and dedication for the Chez. He always worked hard and cared deeply for the gay community. My husband Luis and I couldn’t be more honored that Bryan has passed the torch to us. We feel a great responsibility of having his life’s work in our hands.

You have your own history in our community, but for those who aren’t familiar, tell us a bit about you and your background.

I started out as a bar back at the Beach Club in West Haven. I then moved on to work at the Brook Café in Westport; it was at the Brook that I took up DJing. I later took a position working at the Polo and then moved on to The Chez. Over the Past 20 years I have probably DJ’ed at every gay club in Connecticut; but the Chez has always been my home. I also have ten years of large format, multiple locations Retail Management experience. My husband Luis and I currently reside in the town of Wallingford with our two children.

What convinced you to take the plunge and buy the Chez?

In French, the word Chez means, home; this place has been my home for the past 15 years of my life. Bryan has been my best friend for over twenty years. He came to me in late summer of 2017 and informed me that the Chez would be closing its doors for good on December 31st. After many conversations with Bryan, and longer conversations with my husband, Luis and I decided that we simply could not allow this to happen. So we worked out a deal and purchased the Chez. We immediately got to work and implemented a lot of changes. Our mission is to provide the community with an ultimate nightclub experience while living our company vision “There’s something for everyone at the Chez.”

What changes have you implemented to date?

We have had quite a few changes at the Chez which include, A complete rebranding of the Chez’s image and logo, a state of the art POS and inventory system, Staff Uniforms, Updated Policies and procedures, Completely gutted and remodeled the men’s room as well as updating the lighting on the dance floor and stage, which includes lasers and CO2. One of the new policies implemented is the staff is not allowed to drink; this allows us to stay focused on customer service and reach our main goal which is to make sure
all our customers are having a great time. I’m also very big on brand recognition with a huge social media presence. We are currently on Facebook and Instagram controlled and maintained by my sister, Vincenza.

**What are your upcoming plans for the Chez?**

Our 2018 calendar is fully booked. We have many exciting events planned and are committed to providing different themed nights for our customers every weekend. In the spring, we plan on redoing our patio to provide a nicer space for our customers to enjoy in the warmer months. We also have plans to redo the ladies room in the fall.

**If someone hasn’t been to the Chez in awhile, what do you want them to know about it today that you hope will bring them back?**

Our staff is committed to providing a safe and fun experience. The Chez is coming alive again. We are seeing new faces, old faces and happy faces. As we are getting busier and busier, I reach out to customers and we are getting nothing but positive feedback on the progress and experience.

So, come to the Chez and let us welcome you home!
Couzens: Chez Revival 'Survival of Fittest'

by Joshua O'Connell

It wasn’t a foregone conclusion when Bryan Couzens was ready to move on that he would sell the Chez to another owner. In fact, it almost closed. "There comes a point when you have to make the decision 'What is best for me?'", said Bryan Couzens, who owned the Chez for a decade. "I decided that was going to close the bar in December of 2017. I had a few people interested in buying the bar, and one of the offers was considerably more. I did not have a good feeling and pulled out of the transaction.

"I decided if the bar was going to close, I wanted to be the one to close, and not sell to someone that was going to make a ton of changes and end up failing and close overnight, like so many of the other Connecticut bars."

Fortunately, close friend John Pepe expressed an interest in continuing what had been a tradition in Connecticut for more than 40 years. "I told John when we first talked about the purchase, it was going to be survival of the fittest," Couzens said. "We took a 60% drop in business since 2001 when I stared doing the books. Give people what they want and you will be fine!"

The Chez has only had three owners since its founding, which has led to a remarkable consistency in the community. Couzens noted: "The Chez opened in June of 1976. It has been continuously run as a full time gay bar since it opened. The [original] owner Gary, was a super supportive straight ally."

Couzens' own involvement came starting in 1995, where he started as a barback. "I was promoted to assistant manager in 1999. After the fire in 2001, the full time manager Bruce, who hired me, decided to move out of state. I co-managed the bar for a few years then took over as general manager. I made the purchase of the business in 2008, from the original owner."

As Couzens transitions from owner to avid supporter, he sees the Chez, then and now, as a place the community sees as their home. "It's refreshing to see people call the bar home. Not everyone has families that are open to accept them, and they need a space they can be themselves in."

Chez Shows Through the Years

Couzens shared some of the names and faces who have visited the Chez through the years:

- Club Icons - Kristine W, Amber, Ultra Nate, Expose', Kimberley Locke, Tiffany, Pointer Sisters, Jeaninne Tracey.
- International Drag Stars - Lady Bunny, Hedda Lettuce, Jackie Beat.
- "Over 20 From RuPaul's Drag Race: Nina Flowers, Alexis Mateo, Yara Sofia, Kenya Michaels, Lineysha Sparx, to name a few.
- DJ Escape, DJ Lady Tita, DJ John Rizzo, DJ Disciple.
- "All the local drag performers who are countless! "

photo courtesy the Chez Est
The Dorothy Awards

The 15th annual event honored LGBTQ+ Nutmeggers making a difference in our community, while also serving as the largest annual fundraiser for the Pride Center. To learn more about the event and this year’s honorees, visit www.dorothyawards.com

Photos by Megan McGory Gleason
Celebrating Pride Statewide

20 years ago, Connecticut Pride was divided among three events in the state. Here’s what those events look like today.

By Rebecca Spadacenta

Pride isn’t just rainbow flags with an official name. It is celebrating who you are and realizing that no matter where you come from, what you love and who you are, you deserve to take pride in yourself. There is a rich history of Pride culture, art, and history for LGBTQ+ people as they come to terms with, celebrate and stand up for what makes them unique.

Community centers and groups throughout the state offer programs and education to promote the visibility and safety of LGBTQ+ individuals and highlight their importance in the larger non-LGBTQ+ society. They are a vital resource for people who are searching for validation, conversation and community.

These centers and groups sponsor larger LGBTQ+ events annually and provide an opportunity for the greater community to take part in a celebration of themselves.

Norwalk, Hartford, and New Haven all have upcoming Pride events that promise a thrilling and fulfilling experience.

Norwalk

The Triangle Community Center

photo by Megan McGory Gleason
nity Center of Norwalk is hosting Pride in the Park on Saturday, June 9th, 2018 from 12:00-8:00 PM. Not only is the event meant to educate attendees about the programs, service and resources available to the LGBTQ+ community, but it promotes and provides activities for the community to encourage their participation in the cultural, educational and civic life in Fairfield County and throughout the state. The Triangle Community Center (TCC) hopes to increase the visibility and enhance the quality of life of the LGBTQ+ community in the county and in the state of Connecticut.

Anthony Crisci, executive director of the TCC, said that “the celebration of Pride serves as a reminder of how far our community has come in achieving legal equality, but also as a reminder of how much progress is left to be made until all members of our community achieve ‘lived equality.’ The celebration itself is a commemoration of the NYC Stonewall Riots in 1969, and celebrate our community’s legacy of visible, loud, and, of course, proud protest in the face of discrimination and violence. Since violence and discrimination against members of our community continue today, there continues to be an important need for us to commemorate this event.”

He says that his favorite part of the event is seeing the diverse community come out in large numbers to be present together and seeing them have a great time freely being their authentic selves.

Pride in the Park, a celebration running since 2014, is a continuation of Fairfield County Pride, which started in 2001. The event has drawn over 3,000 people each year. Fairfield County is the most densely populated county in the state of Connecticut and has a huge diversity of cultures, neighborhoods, cities, towns, and identities that it represents. The event hopes to make Fairfield County as a whole a more welcoming and affirming place for LGBTQ+ people and all members of
the community who live there and challenge the misconception that Fairfield County is not a diverse place. This year, Pride in the Park will be featuring Chi Chi DeVayne, Milk Queen, and Jiggly Caliente from RuPaul’s Drag Race, lesbian rock band Anti-gone Rising, and many local performers.

HARTFORD
Hartford Capital City Pride is the Pride event in Hartford, and is planned by a committee of CLARO, Hartford’s nonprofit organization that supports the LGBTQ+ community. It will run from September 7th to September 9th 2018 and feature a flag raising, bar crawl, festival and afterparty and Sunday brunch. The main event is PrideFest 2018, a fun-filled festival on September 8th from 12:00-6:00 located on Pratt Street. Their theme is “Educate, Showcase and Celebrate!”

Pride is about understanding our history, the history that is not taught in schools, and keeping culture alive. The community has made great contributions to healthcare, business, music, fashion, and entertainment, and Pride is a time to come together to celebrate our accomplishments and to discuss important social issues. “We have families, we bleed, we should have the same rights and respect as everyone else,” said entertainment director Ephraim Adamz.

Adamz is excited to “tap into some thoughts for the future,” like body shaming, age discrimination, bullying, and the concept of “no fat, no fem.” Besides uplifting these people, with the growing size of the festival it is also time to think about accessibility, the deaf and disabled, to promote the most inclusive environment possible.

Adamz is proud to recognize diversity, intersectionality, the transgender movement, lesbian and bisexual representation, people of color, seniors, and youth. The celebration will feature local queer artists and drag performers.

NEW HAVEN
The New Haven Pride Center is proud to be hosting the twentieth PRIDE New Haven this year, with the tagline “Celebrating 20 Years of Pride in New Haven.” The event takes place from September 13th to September 16th, 2018 and
Full Pride Calendar

Fairfield County’s Pride in the Park
June 9, 2018 | 12:00-8:00p
For more information, visit ctpridecenter.org/pride_2018

Fairfield PrideFest 2018
June 30, 2018 | 4:00-10:00p
For more information, visit facebook.com and search for Fairfield PrideFest 2018

Bridgeport Pride / Same-Sex Art Show
July 19, 2018 | 5:00 – 10:00p
For more information, check out facebook.com

New London Pride Festival
August 25, 2018 | 12:00 – 8:00p
For more information, visit newlondonpride.com/schedule/

Hartford Capital City Pride
September 7-9 2018
For more information, visit hartfordpride.com

PRIDE New Haven
September 13-16 2018
For more information, visit newhavenpridecenter.org/programming/pride

Please Join Us in New Haven for

PRIDE New Haven
Celebrating 20 Years of Pride in New Haven
September 13 - 16, 2018

The New Haven Pride Center, the producing partner of PRIDE New Haven, offers many resources and services year round!

More info: newhavenpridecenter.org

Photos by Alisha Martinelle and Megan McGary Gleason.
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- Medical Case Management for HIV+ persons

APNH Contacts:
- Main Switchboard: 203.624.0947
- Confidential Testing Line: 475.441.7020

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www.apnh.org
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New Haven Pride Center
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more information:
newhavenpridecenter.org

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Pride New Haven’s block party

turns downtown New Haven into a community-wide safe space for Connecticut’s diverse LGBTQ+ individuals. This event will celebrate, educate, and honor the rich and diverse cultural history of the LGBTQ+ community. The full schedule of events will be released soon, but for now look forward to the PRIDE New Haven Block Party on Saturday, September 15th from 4:00-10:00 PM. This will include food vendors, shopping and information booths, a DJ and outdoor performances throughout the day.

Executive director of the New Haven Pride Center Patrick J. Dunn loves to focus on visibility: “Visibility to defy those who wish to erase our identities, but also visibility to folks that may not be ready to come out. A Pride Celebration can be incredibly meaningful and supportive of individuals who are still in the closet that might watch from afar or read about it after. It can give hope and support to know that there are people like them out there that live authentically as themselves and are okay. Pride events like this provide visibility and form a real sense of community that is vital to the lives of LGBTQ+ people.”

“PRIDE New Haven has a primary focus on celebrating the community by planning events in LGBTQ+ spaces or LGBTQ+ owned venues throughout New

Photo by Megan McGory Gleason
Imperial Sovereign Court of All Connecticut Presents

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Haven and entangling activities throughout the daily lives of New Haveners. Much of the PRIDE New Haven programming happens organically," said Dunn. “The Pride Center looks at the artist applicants for PRIDE New Haven and from there builds out programming to include everyone’s ideas and talents.”

PRIDE New Haven focuses on booking New Haven and Connecticut-based performers. Lots of new artists have applied this year, so this an exciting opportunity to showcase new local talent. One of PRIDE’s biggest assets is that New Haven is central in the state at a crossroads of highways and travel routes, so there is a diverse mix of performers from all over the state. This provides the opportunity to feature all types of art: music, dance, drag, comedy, circus arts, and more. Last year’s events include an all-female comedy night, drag brunch, a tea dance and a visibility march, and the Pride Center is looking forward to even more diverse events this year.

Set aside these weekends on your calendar for the most inclusive, enjoyable and gay events of the year. Pride events throughout Connecticut are a great opportunity to learn about LGBTQ+ history and culture, meet people in your community and celebrate what makes you unique. It is time to take pride in who you are, and the only thing more fun than celebrating yourself is celebrating with others.
When Ain Gordon tells a story, the lines drawn between actor and writer dissolve. His work is not about the impressiveness of literature, but the impact of lives. In his latest collaboration with percussionist Josh Quillen, the pair seek to resurrect the stories of their life’s heroes and invite audiences to honor them the same. In “Radicals in Miniature,” a performance that will be featured in the International Festival of Arts & Ideas, we learn that artist-ry is a personal work, one that asks us to share our intimacies with the world in an effort to prove none of us are alone, even if we feel forgotten.

“It became obvious I had to tell these stories myself rather than ask an actor to do it—this task was my responsibility.” Gordon wrote of the genesis of his piece with the same passion he brings to the stage. "Radicals in Miniature" is not only a performance, but a memorial, its existence a monument to those Gordon lost and sought to remember. “Unsure how to usefully mourn, I began compiling lists,” Gordon wrote, “ways in which I had known these people, ways I had forgotten to remember them, and excavating how I continued to carry the mark of their influence without paying tribute.”

Gordon’s awareness of the influence behind his success was one step towards healing, the real work began when this acknowledgment catalyzed into a living breathing piece of art. So he began writing stories, recollections of past encounters. It was not long before these pages found their way to Quillen and the collaboration began. Having previously collaborated with his Quillen’s quartet, Sō Percussion, Gordon had the perfect working relation-

THE ARTS

Festival to host ’Radicals’ Ideas
Performance prominently features LGBTQ+ themes

By Malia West

In “Radicals in Miniature,” a performance that will be featured in the International Festival of Arts & Ideas, we learn that artistry is a personal work, one that asks us to share our intimacies with the world in an effort to prove none of us are alone, even if we feel forgotten.

“It became obvious I had to tell these stories myself rather than ask an actor to do it—this task was my responsibility.” Gordon wrote of the genesis of his piece with the same passion he brings to the stage. "Radicals in Miniature" is not only a performance, but a memorial, its existence a monument to those Gordon lost and sought to remember. “Unsure how to usefully mourn, I began compiling lists,” Gordon wrote, “ways in which I had known these people, ways I had forgotten to remember them, and excavating how I continued to carry the mark of their influence without paying tribute.”

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ship to build this celebration of life upon.

On their first day working together, Gordon read the twenty pages of story fragments he plucked from his mind. As Gordon shared his stories, Quillen took to Google to find where Gordon’s stories could find resonance with their future audiences. And so “Radicals” grew, it unfolded into a piece that celebrated Quillen and Gordon’s fallen heroes alike. The stories of two men, decades between their births, thousands of miles separating their experiences came together to create a living, beating performance. “The room vibrates with the tug of all our timelines.” Gordon wrote, describing the energy of the experience.

With this piece, Gordon has created a world that his audience can not only experience, but find a home in. This is art that invites you in, art that the Festival holds dear for its ability to stay with audiences even after the curtain falls. This season, the Festival continues to amplify stories of the silenced. We are inviting our community to expand their worldview through the stories of immigrants, refugees, the forgotten LGBTQ+ community and so many other marginalized groups that are fighting for their humanity to be seen.

New Haven has a rich legacy of LGBTQ+ culture, for the past few years the Festival has been proud to shed a light on the people and places that created space for the LGBTQ+ community in New Haven. There is progress to celebrate, from LGBTQ+ led churches to the strong presence of affinity groups in our collegiate and broader New Haven community. But the tradition must continue, the work never stops!

When New Haven natives see their city, their vision should be of equity and celebration. When Gordon chose to bring his piece to the Festival stage it was a choice that supported this vision. The International Festival of Arts & Ideas seeks to broaden the canvas of artistry in New Haven. In order to expand the reach of art in the future, we must acknowledge its origins. So when you hear the name of downtown cabaret legend John Sex or downtown dancer Elaine Shipman, do not trouble yourself wondering why you did not know their stories. Instead, commit your “life-performance” to immortalizing the silent heroes in life. We’re going to need them.

Mr and Miss Gay New Haven

Join us during PRIDE New Haven (September 13-16) for the 2nd Annual Mr & Miss Gay New Haven Pageant!

Friday, September 14, 2018
Contest 11:30p, Crowning 1:00a
Partners Cafe, 365 Crown Street

Pageant Host
Sylvia Heart

Prelim Host
Kiki Lucia

Pageant Contestants

Think you have what it takes to become the next Mr or Miss Gay New Haven? Show off your talent, creativity, and skills and try to take that crown! Preliminary competition on August 20th also hosted at Partners Cafe.

For more info and registration at newhavenpridecenter.org/programming/pride
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