

State launches Safe Harbor Fund

Initiative to provide out-of-state reproductive, gender-affirming care comes amid pushback

By Paul Hughes
STAFF WRITER

HARTFORD — Connecticut is making private funds available to individuals and families to travel to the state to obtain reproductive or gender affirming healthcare that their home states ban or restrict. The state-authorized, privately supported "Safe Harbor Fund" will start ac-

cepting applications on July 1 from nonprofit organizations, community-based providers, or other eligible groups to financially assist patients seeking legally protected reproductive or gender affirming care in Connecticut. It is currently the only such funding source in the U.S., said Treasurer Erick Russell. The fund's board of

trustees on June 4 voted to accept its first \$25,000 private donation from the Fairfield-based Leonard Litz LGBTQ+ Foundation. Russell said on Thursday that there are ongoing discussions with more potential donors, including one who is expected to match the initial contribution from the Leonard Litz Foundation. Russell, Gov. Ned La-

mont, Lt. Gov. Susan By-siewicz announced the launch of the Safe Harbor Fund during a news conference Thursday at the State Office Building in Hartford. Representatives of Planned Parenthood of Southern New England and Reproductive Equity Now joined them. "We're stepping forward and really appreciate the not-for-profits coming together, putting together this fund so folks who do not enjoy the same freedoms that we do here in Fund continues on A10



Paul Hughes/Hearst Connecticut Media
Treasurer Erick Russell, left, listens as Gov. Ned Lamont discusses the launch of the privately supported Safe Harbor Fund during a news conference in Hartford.

Auto parts stores see spike in Conn.

By Luther Turmelle
STAFF WRITER

The high cost of purchasing new cars is driving up demand for parts to fix the older cars that Connecticut consumers are keeping longer. As of May, the average price paid for a new vehicle was at \$49,220, according to Cox Automotive's Kelley Blue Book. That represents a 1.2% increase compared to the same time last year and is down slightly from \$50,326 at the end of 2025, which was the all time high for average new vehicle transaction price. And that, in turn, is spiking demand for bricks-and-mortar auto parts stores in the state, which already has more than 200 locations among the four largest brand name retail locations: Auto Zone, Advance Parts continues on A4



Photos by Brian Lockhart/Hearst Connecticut Media
Work resumes Wednesday on an apartment complex at the former Testo's restaurant property in Bridgeport's North end.

Former Fairfield chief Sullivan dies at 88

By Richard Chumney
STAFF WRITER

FAIRFIELD — Ronald T. Sullivan, a longtime local law enforcement official who led the Fairfield Police Department as chief for six years in the 1990s, has died. Sullivan died suddenly on Wednesday, according to an online obituary shared by the town police department. He was 88. In a Facebook post, Fairfield police said Sullivan began his career with the department as a patrol officer in 1961 and rose through the ranks to become chief in 1991. He retired in 1997. "His leadership, dedication and commitment to public service left Sullivan continues on A10

Long-delayed apartments at former Testo's site moving forward

By Brian Lockhart
STAFF WRITER

BRIDGEPORT — Standing just outside his front door, Wilson Rayes looked across Madison Avenue at the fenced-in property where a backhoe steadily scooped and piled dirt. "At least if they build something, it's better. It's not like a jungle," he said of the activity on the until-recently-dormant lot at Madison and Westfield avenues where Testo's restaurant and catering hall stood before its sale and demolition three years ago. Rayes moved to that North End neighborhood not long before Testo's, run by long-



time Democratic Town Chairman Mario Testa, hosted its last-ever event on New Year's Eve 2022. The Italian establishment shuttered to be sold to developer Amit Lakhotia for housing. On Wednesday, Lakhotia confirmed by phone that, following multiple delays resulting from litigation with the city and financial issues, construction has resumed on his 173-unit market rate apartment complex. "We found a new lender (and) just closed the loan," he said, adding it "feels good" to be moving forward again. He expected the work will take two years. Apartments continues on A4



Jim Shannon/Hearst Connecticut Media
Leah Reyes, a first-time homebuyer, stands outside her Tudor-revival-style home in Hartford that she was able to purchase through a state Department of Housing program called Time to Own.

Time to Own program helps more than 9,000 first-time homebuyers

By Ken Dixon
STAFF WRITER

Connecticut's Time to Own program for new homebuyers has assisted more than 9,000 people who have taken \$180 million in interest-free state loans that can be forgiven if they keep up with their mortgage payments. For people such as Leah Reyes, 41, the \$25,000

she received for a down payment on her historic 103-year-old Tudor-revival-style home near Trinity College in Hartford, finally means solid roots in the community and a chance to build equity instead of paying a landlord every month. "When I first moved to Connecticut, I wasn't really one for putting down major roots," Reyes said in a recent in-

terview. "But a year later, I fell in love with central Connecticut and Hartford. I wanted to purchase a home, heard on the news about Time to Own and everything worked out serendipitously." The nearly four-year-old program was recently allocated another \$10 million by the State Bond Commission, which is controlled by

Gov. Ned Lamont. The \$10 million will support an estimated 400 first-time buyers. Over the program's four years, about \$180 million has been allocated, with about \$29 million still available through the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority, officials there said. First-time homeowners in 160 of the state's 169 municipalities. Own continues on A4