

COVER STORY

HOMETOWN PROUD

Smartest, Wealthiest, Wisest, Smallest And So Much More

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Everybody is the best at something and that goes for all the towns in our readership area, most of them in New Haven County. We think there's more to our towns than crime rates and politics, so we reported until we came up with an honor that every town could wear with pride, or at least a wink and a nudge.

Ansonia

While Ansonia is the tops for many reasons to many people, one of its most enduring claims to history is its more than century-old high school football rivalry with Naugatuck High School, where the record stands at 68-34-10. Dating to 1895, it is the oldest high school football rivalry in New Haven County. Ansonia gets boasting rights as it's currently dominant in the rivalry, which is played out every year on Thanksgiving Day and routinely draws crowds of up to

10,000 people. According to the site www.nvlfballblog.com (Naugatuck Valley League Football), the widest margin of victory was recorded by Ansonia in the 1936 matchup when the game ended 79-0, while the narrowest margin of victory was in 2001 when Naugatuck won, 14-13.

Beacon Falls

A gravel pit in Beacon Falls could become the world's largest fuel cell park in the near future,





BOB MACDONNELL

Wheeler's Island is one of developed islands in the Thimble Island chain off Branford's coastline.

providing enough energy to power about 60,000 homes and displacing a fuel cell park in South Korea as the world's largest. The project's lead, CT Energy & Technology, would develop and own the fuel cell park, which would be loaded with 63.3 megawatts of fuel cells from FuelCell Energy Inc. in Danbury. Fuel cells harvest hydrogen from natural gas, then convert that hydrogen into heat and electricity. A fuel cell can be as small as a mobile home and emits only trace amounts of pollutants. The fuel cell park would take up about 8 acres.

Bethany

In addition to being a popular girl's name — with the high-water mark being in 1984 when the Social Security Administration reported that 50 girl babies were named Bethany in Connecticut — Bethany is one of the wealthiest towns in New Haven County, with an annual median household income around \$110,000, and its average SAT scores are well above average. Soon, the town will be home to the first co-housing community in Connecticut. The 33-acre enclave called Rocky Corner will have 30 houses huddled on 5 acres surrounded by woodlands, fields, pastures and ponds. Co-housing is designed specifically to bring people and families closer together, literally and figuratively.

Branford

It might be the winner of most restaurants and breweries per square foot of any shoreline town, but that's a constantly



MICHAEL MCANDREWS

The Cheshire Land Trust and state protect 330 acres, including Roaring Brook and its falls.

moving target, so we're giving Branford the Coastal King title for having the most islands (the Thimble Islands) and possibly also the most buried treasure (if you believe pirates used the Thimbles as a home base). There are anywhere from about 100 to about 365 islands in the Thimbles, depending on whether it's high or low tide and on whether you count small outcroppings. Of those only about two dozen are inhabited, and they include about 90 or so homes, ranging from a 27-room Tudor-style mansion with tennis and basketball courts, a swimming pool, a golf course and more (owned by Christine Svenningsen, who also owns another half dozen or so of the islands), down to clapboard summer houses that still don't have electricity.

Cheshire

We'll let Money do the talking: "This former farming community still feels like a quintessential New England village, filled with horse barns, gardens, and towering trees," Money magazine said in 2013, when it named Cheshire one of the top 50 best places to live in the United States, just after Twinsburg, Ohio, and before Ballwin, Mo. Money mentioned a median home price (\$287,250 in 2012), reading and math test scores that were 17 percent and 16 percent above average, and a low crime rate.

Fun Fact: Cheshire's Roaring Brook Falls is the highest single-drop waterfall in the state.



RICK HARTFORD

The Chester-Hadlyme Ferry crossing the Connecticut River as seen from the grounds of Gillette Castle.

Chester

Chester takes the QTP (Quaint Transportation Prize) because for nearly 250 years, the Chester-Hadlyme ferry has been bringing visitors across the Connecticut River. These days the ferry, which takes 8 minutes, connects eager visitors to the Essex Steam Train on one side of the river and Gillette Castle on the other.

Clinton

He spent his childhood summers at the beach in Clinton,

Enjoying the company of pink and purple kittens,

Here, he collected shells and sand and grime

And he might have even learned to rhyme.

He saw one fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish

And perfected his knack for rhythm and gibberish.

At the last he was Dr. Seuss and belonged to the world

But as a lad, he was one of this beach town's boys and girls.



Derby

At 5.4 square miles, Derby easily lays claim to being the best at being the smallest town in New Haven County. Its closest competitor is neighbor Ansonia (6.2 square miles) followed by Beacon Falls at 9.9 square miles. For comparison purposes, Connecticut is roughly 5,000 square miles.

Fun fact: In its heyday, the town's 1889 Sterling Opera House hosted performances, including magician Harry Houdini, comedian Red Skelton, actor Lionel Barrymore and aviatrix Amelia Earhart. For some time, the building has been vacant. Or has it? It was featured on TV's "Ghost Hunters" in 2011.

Durham

Even if you've lived under a rock or in the quietest part of Connecticut's Quiet Corner, you've heard about the Durham Fair. It is the second largest fair in North America (an entire continent!) without paid management or employees. The four-day extravaganza, held the last full weekend of each September, will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2019. It has been an annual event except for 1938 (the hurricane) and the World War II years of 1942, 1943 and 1944.

Fun facts: The fair has awarded more than \$500,000



The Griswold Inn in Essex is one of the oldest continuously operating inns in the country.

in academic scholarships since 1966, and it played a role in organizing the Durham District Nurse Association.

East Haven

Connecticut's aviation history is rich (you've heard our contention that we were first in flight, right? Move over Wright Brothers!). Anyway, Greater New Haven played more than a bit part. First there were the Yale tutors who built and launched hot air balloons in the 1780s, followed more than a century later by an actual early plane landing at Yale Field. By 1929, they were breaking ground on what would become Tweed Airport, which straddles the East Haven and New Haven border. It opened in 1931 and its first manager was pilot Jack Tweed, who remained until 1961. Besides Bradley International Airport near the Massachusetts border, Tweed is the only other airline airport in the state. It averages more than 100 aircraft



Tweed Regional Airport, on the East Haven-New Haven border, has had some fairly impressive visitors.

operations (takeoffs or landings) a day.

Essex

Yes, yes, this riverfront town has got the famous Essex Steam Train, the charming Connecticut River Museum and a delightfully quaint downtown, but it's tops to us because of "The Gris." The Griswold Inn is one of the oldest in the country, having opened "for business to yachtsmen and overland travelers" in 1776. The inn, founded by three brothers according to its Wikipedia page, has been run by only six families since the inn and the country were born and remains a popular dining spot for special occasions in particular.

Fun fact: The popular vampire soap opera "Dark Shadows" filmed many of its scenes at the inn.

Guilford

Green. It's almost impossible to say Guilford without following it with "green," that sweetly New



West Beach at Hammonasset State Park in Madison.

England parcel of land that hosts major events as well as impromptu picnics and provides beautiful scenery to shops, restaurants and more. But there's more to Guilford, lots more. For bragging rights, Guilford gets to be the biggest small town in New Haven County. At 49.7 square miles, it edges out Haddam at 46.4 square miles, and Wallingford at 39.9 rounding out the top three.

Hamden

It's impossible to talk about youth hockey in Connecticut without talking about Hamden. New Haven might have been the birthplace of hockey in Connecticut, but Hamden is where it spent its rowdy youth and high school years. Midway between the battlefield on which Yale and Quinnipiac universities wage the War On Whitney Avenue, Hamden High School's hockey team can hold its head high. The team has won 17 state championships (most recently five years ago) and a national championship in 1976. It was the original home team of Jonathan Quick, a Stanley Cup champion goalie who plays for the L.A. Kings.

Killingworth

Not many towns in Connecticut can claim to have been made famous by the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow or for killing birds. This

town gets both honors. In one poem, "The Birds of Killingworth" are part of the "Tales of a Wayside Inn", which Longfellow published in three parts from 1863 to 1873. This one, told in rhyme, is about farmers so annoyed by marauding birds that they decide to kill them off.

*"And thrifty farmers, as they tilled the earth,
Heard with alarm the cawing of the crow....
They shook their heads, and doomed with
dreadful words
To swift destruction the whole race of birds....
The birds were doomed; and, as the record shows,
A bounty offered for the heads of crows."*

It got pretty bloody after that. By the following spring, Killingworth realized its mistake and welcomed birds back. Other than that, it's a lovely town.

Madison

Home of champions. Mac Bohannon and Kiley McKinnon are the top male and female aerialists in the world following this winter's freestyle ski competition in Belarus; the Daniel Hand Boys Ice Hockey team won the Southern Connecticut Conference Division II in 2014; and "Madison" was in the top 10 girl baby names for Connecticut babies in 2014. The



American Idol winner Nick Fradiani performs at a concert on Guilford Town Green several months ago.

BRAD HERRIGAN

MICHAEL MCANDREWS



Lyman Orchard's pick-your-own fields in Middlefield, home to the orchard for centuries.

CLOE POISSON

Social Security Administration recently reported that 120 Connecticut newborn girls were named Madison last year. And the biggest brag? The highest average SAT scores in New Haven County — 582 reading, 573 writing and 587 math. Each of those average scores are 75 points or higher above the state averages, according to www.cerc.com.

Meriden

Castle Craig. Anyone who has driven along I-691, or I-84 or I-91 for that matter, have seen the century-old "castle" perched atop Hubbard Park. The 32-foot tall castle has a plaque that says, in part: "It has the distinction of being the highest point within 25 miles (40 km) of the coast from Maine to Florida....Meriden industrialist Walter Hubbard donated the tower and the surrounding park, which a grateful Meriden named after him." Turns out, the plaque is inaccurate regarding its "highest point" claim — as the castle's Wikipedia page reports — but no one disputes that Hubbard was a sweetheart of a guy.

Middlefield

Small but mighty Middlefield has about 4,500 residents but a rich past. Two of its most prominent citizens, William Lyman and Phineas Miller Augur, led the way in opposing the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Lyman's farm (you know Lyman Orchards, of course, owned and operated there since 1741) was a station stop

on the Underground Railroad and Augur was a "conductor."

Middletown

Where to begin — the riverfront? Wesleyan University? Kid City? Oddfellows Playhouse? Xavier? All wonderful, but we gotta go with O'Rourke's Diner, which has had several lives itself, enriched thousands of others and nursed the hangovers of more than a few college kids. It began in 1941, when an O'Rourke (Jack)



HANDOUT PHOTO

O'Rourke's Diner, a Middletown institution for decades.



STEPHEN DUNN

A new boardwalk stretches for miles at the Silver Sands State Park in Milford.

bought Dunn's Diner and five years later replaced it with the shiny new diner. It thrives for decades, succumbs to fire in 2006, and thanks to the community rises from its own ashes.

Milford

At least in New Haven County, Milford puts the shore in shoreline with the longest stretch of shoreline of any town in Connecticut. There are five public beaches, seven private beaches and a boardwalk (rebuilt since Irene and Sandy) that stretches from Silver Sands State Park to Walnut Beach in Devon.



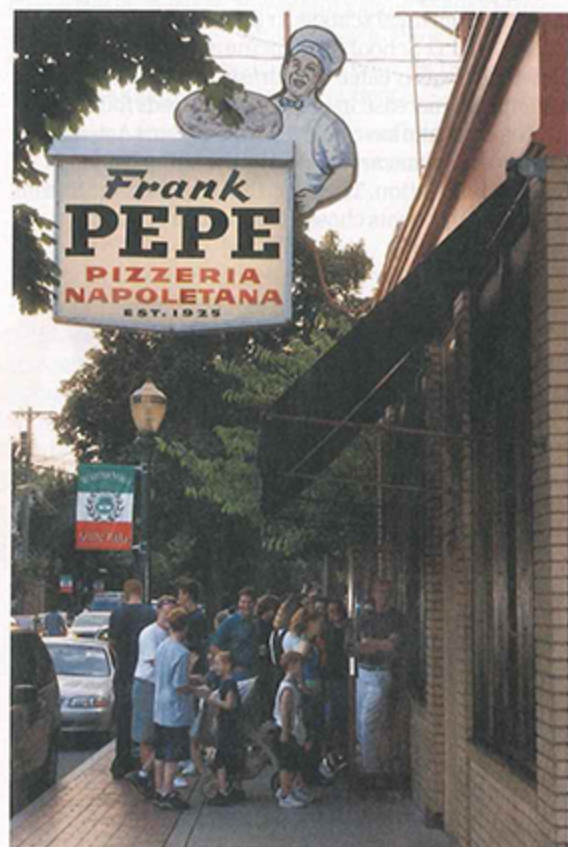
Naugatuck

Keds, the best sneakers of all time according to many, were made in Naugatuck from 1917 to the 1980s with the early models including heels and lady lace-ups that went at least half way up the shin. A shoutout to Naugatuck's U.S. Rubber Co., whose product was far more inventive than its name.

Fun fact: Sneakers got their name because they were so quiet you could sneak up on people.

New Haven

Yale, schmale. Sure we love the old school, but there's so much more to New Haven. First off, the city that this year launched its ambitious Greatest Small City In American campaign (#GSCIA, if you haven't heard) is the most populous burg in the county, with 129,898 citizens as of 2012, with Waterbury running the



BOB MACDONNELL

Be prepared for lines outside Wooster Square area pizzerias in New Haven. And yes, it's worth the wait. Pepe's, one of the originals, was founded in 1925.

closest second with 110,074. Third place is a virtual tie between Hamden with 60,735 citizens and Meriden with 60,674.

Fun fact: It also has the best pizza in America, according to USA Today and everyone else.

North Branford

In 1870, brothers Henry Stevens and David Stevens Jr. "established a thriving card business in Northford.... They made the usual business cards for men, but their great success lay in Christmas cards, valentines and 'sparking' cards, carrying appropriate messages. By 1871 they were experimenting with highly ornamented Christmas cards. The Stevens brothers... soon found themselves competing with 25 other Christmas card companies — all in Northford. For 10 years Northford led the industry in production of Christmas cards," Northford historian Dr. Henry C. Miller wrote in the Journal of the New Haven Colony Historical Society.

Fun fact: The town hosts an annual Potato and Corn Festival.

North Haven

Two years ago North Haven became home to one of a dozen new medical schools in the country. The Frank H. Netter M.D. School of Medicine at Quinnipiac University was created to address, in part, an anticipated increase in medical care needs following the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, as well as the aging baby boomer population. The class that began in autumn 2014 had 90 students chosen from a field of 5,252 applicants.

Old Saybrook

Saybrook Breakwater Light is the model for the lighthouse on Connecticut's "Preserve The Sound" license plates. The 127-year-old lighthouse, which marks the harbor channel at the mouth of the Connecticut River, is for sale.



Orange

The town of Orange did its part during the Cold War to protect New Haven from Boris and Natasha by hosting a Nike missile site. The anti-aircraft missiles were developed after World War II as a check on advancing jet technology. When Nike missile sites around the country were decommissioned, the properties were offered first to government agencies, and Orange's facility became the home of what is today the 103rd Air Control Squadron, a part of the Connecticut Air National Guard.

Fun fact: Pez candy is headquartered in Orange. Its distinctive dispenser, which looks like a lighter, was meant to encourage people to quit smoking.

Oxford

Sure, Oxford is in the top five when it comes

to median household income (2012 figures), but the town easily wins as the absolute best place in all of New Haven county to enjoy private jet eye candy. And, the hand's-down best place to do it from is 121 Restaurant & Bar. Not only does 121 boast some of the best reviews in the state for its food, but the views of everything from corporate jets to restored World War II-era aircraft is spectacular whether you are outside on the deck or inside at one of the long bank of tables along the window that parallels the runway. If it's a good day perhaps you'll get to see hedge-fund magnate Paul Tudor Jones leave or arrive in his sporty Falcon 50 jet.

Prospect

Robert J. Chatfield has been mayor of Prospect since 1978. Just as a reminder, in 1978, Jimmy Carter was president of the United States, the movie "Grease" was debuting on summer movie screens and the average cost for a gallon of gas was 63 cents. It was also the year that Germany stopped production on the Volkswagen Beetle and in the world of technology, the first computer bulletin board system BBS was created. No wonder he is the longest serving mayor in Connecticut.

Shelton

Shelton is home to one of the top five private employers in Connecticut's central coast based on number of employees. According to cteconomicdevelopment.com, the Bic Corp. has some 900 employees in Shelton. And Bic is not alone in Shelton's business community, which also includes Transwitch Corp., Latex International, Enhanced Care Initiatives LLC, Corporate Management Solutions, Survey Sampling Intl LLC, Nielsen Monitor Plus, Hartford and Precision Resource — all with 200 or more employees.

Fun fact: Shelton was named "The Best Affordable Suburb in Connecticut" by Bloomberg Businessweek in 2009 and 2010.

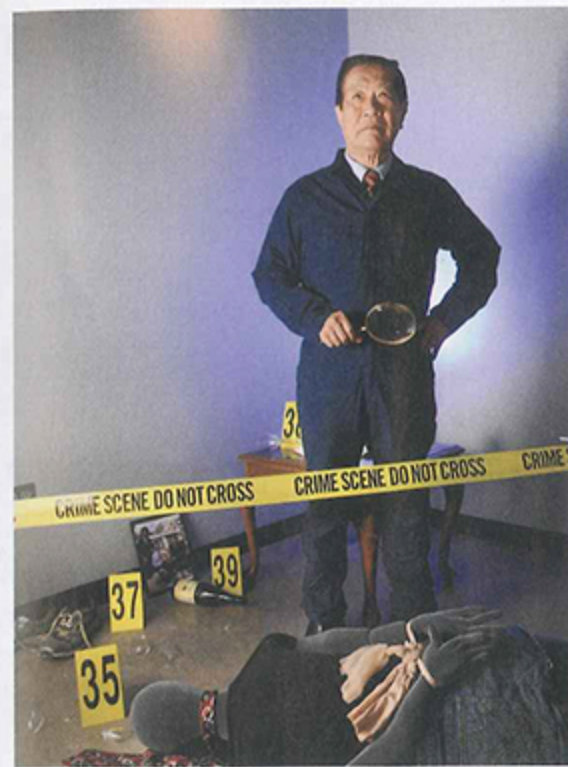
Southbury

The wisest town in New Haven County — the median age is the highest at 50 — so it's not surprising to learn that the town in 1937 rejected Nazi camps. That move inspired the 2012 documentary "Home of the Brave."



Wallingford

Wallingford oozes the heady steadiness that typifies Connecticut towns, given that it is home to one of the longest serving mayors, William W. Dickinson Jr. And if that weren't enough,



Dr. Henry Lee at the Institute of Forensic Science at University of New Haven that is named for him.

it's home to Choate, one of the oldest and most exclusive prep schools in the country. Those two facts are enough to give Wallingford top town billing alone, but still there's another, perhaps even more dazzling fun fact: Wallingford, in all probability, is Stars Hollow. Yes, Stars Hollow, the beloved, fictional small Connecticut town in the onetime hit TV show "Gilmore Girls." The Stars Hollow Wikipedia page says: "There are many clues given during the course of the show as to its location in Connecticut.... The most likely candidate then would be... Wallingford, Connecticut, which, like Stars Hollow, has a gazebo, a town green, locally owned diners, the zip code 06492, and has a prep school, Choate Rosemary Hall, which Chilton [the private prep school in the TV show] is based on."

Waterbury

The Brass City is perhaps most famous for its famous people, who include actor Dylan McDermott ("The Practice"); photographer Annie Leibovitz; actor Bob Crane ("Hogan's Heroes"); actress Rosalind Russell ("His Gal Friday"); Michael J. McGivney, Catholic priest and founder of the Knights of Columbus; Porter Goss, former director of the CIA; and Joan Joyce, All-American softball player who also excelled in basketball, bowling and golf. And there are dozens more.

West Haven

The University of New Haven, one of the fastest growing universities in Connecticut, is on 82 acres in West Haven where it serves most of its 6,500 undergraduates and many of its 4,800 graduate students. The university has five colleges and of those perhaps best known are its Tagliatela College of Engineering, which was honored as Top Tier Nationally by U.S. News & World Report's Best College's edition in 2014, and its Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences. Under President Steven H. Kaplan, some \$175 million has been invested in the university's infrastructure.

Westbrook

As shoreline communities go, Westbrook residents often identify by their beach community. There are more than a dozen private beach associations in town — Chapman Beach, Coral Sands, Grove Beach Point, Grove Beach Terrace, Horse Hill, Island View, Kelsey Point, Little Standard, Middle Beach, Pilot's Point, Pointina, Quotonset Beach, Sagamore Terrace, Salt Works, Stannard Beach and West Beach.

Fun fact: Actor Art Carney (Norton on the classic TV show "The Honeymooners") spent much of his later life at his home in Westbrook.

Woodbridge

This New Haven suburb of about 9,000 people grabs top honors as the wealthiest and brainiest. Figures for 2012 show Woodbridge has the highest median household income in the county at \$137,216. Its closest competition — and still cracking the six-figure ceiling — were Bethany at \$109,564, Oxford at \$107,308, Madison at \$107,062 and Cheshire at \$100,587. No other town in New Haven County can touch Woodbridge for percentage of people (age 25 and older) with a bachelor's degree or higher because in town, 68 percent, or about two out of every three people, have attained that educational level.



Children playing along a sandbar in Westbrook.