NEWS

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Statewide lottery features local pizza icons in scratch-off

BY NAUSICAA CHU
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Connecticut lottery players could be rolling in dough — in more than one way — with the launch of a new statewide scratch-off game.

In celebration of National Pizza Month, Connecticut Lottery last week debuted a limited-edition scratch-off lottery ticket featuring images of pies from Frank Pepe Pizzeria Napoletana, Sally's Apizza, and Modern Apizza. At a Friday press conference at Wooster Street Archway, Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz '83 and Rep. Rosa DeLauro hailed the collaboration and praised the three pizzerias' impact on Connecticut culture.

"Today, we are celebrating much more than a new lottery ticket. Today is about our pride in one of the things that we do best, and this ticket recognizes the great tradition of the best pizza in the country," Bysiewicz said at the event.

According to Connecticut Lottery's website, over 2 million limited-edition lottery tickets have been printed. Prize amounts range from $5 to $50,000.

Bysiewicz and DeLauro partook in a ceremonial first scratch of the lottery tickets. Neither won a prize.

Connecticut Lottery President and CEO Frank Suarez said in an interview that the collaboration took about nine months of planning. Artists and designers researched pizza and used actual pictures of Pepe's, Sally's and Modern pies in the scratch-off ticket, he said. Each ticket includes five pies from each restaurant that players can scratch off.

"It was a very fun process, but very thorough," Suarez said. "We want to make sure it's authentic."

The ticket sales will raise funds for education, mental health and health care programs, according to Suarez.

In her remarks, DeLauro, a Democratic co-chair of the Italian American Congressional Delegation, praised the Italian immigrants who "brought this work meal with them to a new world."

"They made it into a culinary icon," DeLauro said. "These institutions have given us a place to gather and an identity to rally around. It is no exaggeration to say that apizza is a part of our social fabric."

DeLauro, who grew up in Wooster Square near Pepe's and Sally's, has been a longtime supporter of New Haven apizza. In 2024, DeLauro declared New Haven the "Pizza Capital of the United States" on the steps of the United States Capitol. The move brought praise from Connecticut residents and outrage from New Yorkers, including then-Mayor Eric Adams.

Bysiewicz also waded into the national debate over the best pizza with a remark that appeared to target Chicago's cuisine.

"When you need a spatula to serve deep dish pizza, it is a casserole," she said.

Local New Haven pizza restaurants have brought people together for decades, Bysiewicz said, and the lottery collaboration was a continuation of Connecticut's culinary traditions. Bysiewicz said she believed the tickets were "a unique keepsake" that buyers would not throw out.

Bysiewicz and DeLauro did not take a stance on the ongoing debate over the best New Haven pizza establishment. In an interview, Bysiewicz declined to comment on which was her favorite.

"It would be like picking amongst your children," she said.

The overall odds of winning the lottery are 1 in 4.16, according to Connecticut Lottery's website.

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At a Friday launch, Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz '83 and Rep. Rosa DeLauro played the first tickets in the state lottery's Connecticut Apizza scratch-off game. Players can win up to $50,000 from the game, which features three New Haven pizza restaurants.

Now debt-free, New Haven Pride Center hosts annual block party

BY PREMRUDEE MEPREMWATTANA
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Drag queens danced to pop music, street vendors sold handmade crafts and New Haven residents waved rainbow flags at the New Haven Pride Center's annual pride celebration on Saturday afternoon.

At the intersection of Crown and Orange streets in the city's Ninth Square neighborhood, community members gathered to watch performances and interact with artists, nonprofit leaders and activists. This year's event comes as the organization continues to rebuild from an internal financial crisis that came to a head earlier this year.

The New Haven Pride Center stopped operating in February after accruing more than $200,000 in debt owed to the Internal Revenue Service since 2022, when the organization's Board of Directors discovered that its then-executive director failed to file the organization's taxes with the IRS.

After its February shutdown, the center launched Project Phoenix, a fundraising campaign to support its reopening. By April, the center had raised $500,000, more than enough to pay back its $125,000 debt.

The center's acting executive director Chris Freimuth DIV '25 said the organization also participated in The Great Give, an annual fundraiser for New Haven nonprofits, in an interview during the event. During the 36-hour campaign in May, Freimuth said, the center raised over $15,000, which was more than it received in the last three years combined.

"This event has been a way of saying, like, 'thank you, New Haven. We're back. Like, you got our backs, we got yours,'" Freimuth said. "This is just like a big festival to say 'we're here, we're not going anywhere.' And so starting Monday morning, the job is let's get things done. Let's get things done."

The center reopened its doors in April, and is in the process of restoring its status as "a queer home for all people," according to their website.

"The New Haven Pride Center sort of feels like a spring that has been sort of getting coiled tighter and tighter and tighter by the pressure of that financial burden over the last few years," Freimuth said. "And with the release of that, by way of Project Phoenix, the energy that you can imagine from, like, a tightened coil, let loose."

Freimuth entered his role at the organization's helm in July, after past executive directors Juancarlos Soto and Edward Summers stepped down in April and November of last year, respectively.

"The vibe is basically joy and liberation," Freimuth said when asked about his vision for the center. He said he was "thinking of the New Haven Pride Center as the Queer Town Green. And so it's a place where everybody feels safe, everybody feels welcome."

According to the organization's website, the center has "new leadership at all levels, new organizational structure, and new vision."

Freimuth said that the staff that were working at the center in February have left for other jobs. Since reopening, the center has recruited six new people to its Board of Directors.

"It's been a slow restart," Sam Ernest DIV '18 GRD '26, the organization's administrative coordinator, said in an interview. "We have open hours, but we're very deliberate with how we're getting our programs back up and running."

Ernest said the organization was offering fewer services than it had before it shut down, but that it was working to build connections with other organizations that support queer communities.

Pride draws activists and artists

Ian Jackson, a friend of Freimuth's, said Saturday marked his first time attending New Haven Pride.

"I'm loving this event. It's beautiful," he said. "I'm so happy to see New Haven come out and really celebrate the queer community."

Several vendors sold clothing, handmade crafts, jewelry and books, while local nonprofits offered informational materials about their work.

"Pride to me means solidarity and resistance in the face of oppression," Heather Nielsen, a representative tabling for the New Haven Immigrants Coalition, said. "Everyone needs to take away the understanding that we are better together and that an intersectional approach to oppression is the only way we are ever going to claw power back from those who want to keep us down."

Jordan McMillan, a vendor at the event, sold handmade textile products made of free and thrifted upcycled fabrics, emblazoned with phrases like "gay audacity," "up to no good" and "Free Palestine."

"Being together and being joyful together is also a very important piece of liberation and protest," McMillan said.

The New Haven Pride Center opened in November 1996.

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PREMRUDEE MEPREMWATTANA / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
In April, the center re-opened after a debt crisis forced it to shut down in February. At its annual pride event on Saturday, community members, activists and performers gathered to celebrate the local LGBTQ+ community as the nonprofit rebuilds.